Tamil TIMES

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Norway Peace Delegation comprising Norwegian Deputy Foreign Minister Vidgar Helgsornis, Erick Solhiem and the Norwegian Ambassador in Sri Lanka meeting Prime Minister Ranil Wickramasinghe at the Temple Trees in Colombo on 10 January

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-Voltaire

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A Mood of Cautious Optimism

Until recently, for many years Sri Lanka's capital city, Colombo, and its suburbs presented an image of being a place under siege from within. Frequent, audacious and devastating bomb attacks, mostly carried out by suicide-bombers, on high profile commercial establishments like the island's Central Bank complex, twin-tower World Trade Centre (long before September 11, 2001), oil installations, the only international airport and the adjoining airforce base, assassinations of many leading political and military personalities in the country, including one President and a failed attempt on the current President, had forced the authorities to turn the capital and surrounding areas into a highly fortified place littered with security barriers, barricades, roadblocks and checkpoints manned by jittery soldiers armed with machine guns and klashnikovs at the ready to fire. But since the new government assumed office, all such security barriers and fortifications have been removed, and now the capital and its suburbs give the impression and an image of being a place freed from its siege.

As far as the whole country is concerned guns have gone silent and bombs are not exploding. The people are moving about and carrying on with their normal lives as if the days of violence and war are a thing of a nightmare in the distant past. On the whole there is a relaxed feeling all-around. So much so, for the first time in many years tens of thousands of people gathered at the Galle Face Green in Colombo to celebrate Christmas and to usher in the New Year. What a transformation and how did this happen?

Not that peace has returned to the island ravaged by internal civil war for several decades. The outcome of the parliamentary election on December 5 resulting in a new government headed by Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe and the expectation of a peaceful rapprochement with the LTTE provided the necessary background and impetus for this welcome development. More importantly, it also demonstrated the long and deep felt desire of the people to lead a normal life in peace without recourse to violence and war.

The unilateral action on the part of the LTTE in declaring a ceasefire for a month beginning 24 December promptly and very wisely reciprocated by the new government with its own cessation of hostilities for the same period have raised hopes and expectations of peace returning. Not that the people have forgotten the experience of past failures at peacemaking. However there is a pervasive mood of cautious optimism.

The government has moved faster than expected in removing restrictions placed on the transport of essential goods to LTTE controlled areas. Restrictions placed on the movement of people between government and LTTE controlled areas in the North-East have also been relaxed substantially. These measures, which are essentially humanitarian in nature, have begun to alleviate the day to day problems in which the people have been trapped for many years.

The resuscitated peace process with Norwegian facilitation appears to be gathering momentum at a pace that none had anticipated. The Norwegian government and its facilitators have demonstrated sincere commitment to assisting the peace process in Sri Lanka. In an exercise in shuttle diplomacy, they have already met both sides at leading levels and other concerned parties and discussed preliminary matters to take the process forward. They have also requested the government and the LTTE to extend the period of their cessation of hostilities to which both sides have acceded. A draft Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) to be entered into between the government and the LTTE concerning the peace process is presently under discussion, and all indications are that the parties will subscribe to such an understanding in the near future. In the meantime, those activists who have always campaigned for an end to the war with a negotiated political solution to the ethnic conflict within a framework that would guarantee the protection of human rights of all people have urged that any MoU to be entered into between the government and the LTTE should provide for such a guarantee.

The question is as to when and how soon substantive talks on resolving the political and constitutional issues will commence between the parties. One obstacle to an early commencement of such talks would appear to be the pre-condition raised by the LTTE that the proscription imposed on it by the government should be lifted. The government for its part, without summarily rejecting the LTTE's precondition, has responded by saying that this issue could be considered as the talks progress.

Experience in other areas of similar conflict has shown that no amount of humanitarian and confidence building measures would bring about an end to the conflict and restore lasting peace unless an agreement is reached between the parties on the substantive political and constitutional issues. What is important is that the present state of goodwill between the parties and the climate of genuine support among all sections of the people and communities for the advancement of the peace process must be sustained. It should be realised that there are forces that have always been inimical to a peaceful resolution of the conflict that are waiting on the wings to sabotage the peace process. Any protracted arguments on pre-conditions before substantive talks commence that might undermine the current favourable climate should therefore be avoided.

Inclusion of Human Rights Measures Urged

The Peace Support Group of Sri Lanka comprising prominent human and civic rights activists and academics have urged that any ceasefire agreement in the form of a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) between the Government and the Tamil Tigers should provide for the guaranty of certain fundamental human rights.

The PSG in a statement said, "We the undersigned members of the Peace Support Group welcome the efforts facilitated by Norway to formalize the cessation of hostilities by the government and the LTTE in a ceasefire agreement. Firmly convinced that the durability of such an agreement and this contribution to a political settlement of the ethnic conflict will be invaluably enhanced by the explicit inclusion of human rights and humanitarian considerations, we strongly urge that the following issues be included in it or form the basis of a separate Memorandum of Understanding between the government and the LTTE at the outset of the reactivated peace process:

- Freedom of expression, association and movement.
- Freedom of movement of food and other essential items.
- Release of detainees and prisoners.
- End to extra-judicial killings, inclu ding political assassinations.
- End to torture.
- Protection of the civilian population and prevention of attacks on civilian targets.
- Prevention and investigations into rape in custody.
- Prevention of the recruitment and deployment of child combatants.
- Strengthening of independent judicial processes.
- Strengthening of democratic in stitutions at the national and local levels.
- Respect for the independence and integrity of civil society organizations and groups.
- The establishment of a mechanism of independent, international human rights monitoring with the help of the Office of the High Commissioner of Human Rights.
- Respect for international humanitarian norms applicable in situations of internal armed conflict.
- Immediate halt of the laying of Anti Personnel Landmines. Clearing of such mines already laid.

We reiterate our firm belief in the pivotal importance of human rights concerns in peace making and urge that they be addressed at the outset of the reactivated peace process.

The signatories to the statement are: Sunila Abeysekera, Sunanda Deshapriya, Sunil Bastian, Rohan Edirisinha, Ketheshwaran Loganathan, Jehan Perera, Paikiasothy Saravanamuttu, Javid Yusuf, Joe William, Radhika Coomraswamy, Jeevan Thiagarajah.

Amnesty Urges Commitment to Human Rights

19 Dec - Amnesty International, the human rights watchdog on 19 December wrote to recently-elected Prime Minister Ranil Wickremasinghe about human rights concerns in the country, and called for an end to impunity for violators, faster investigations of cases and sought assurances executions would not be resumed. Amnesty also called for a review of Sri Lanka's notorious Prevention of Terrorism Act (PTA) and "an investigative body fully independent of the police."

The organization said that it hoped that human rights commitments outlined in the political manifesto of the new ruling party, the United National Party (UNP), would become reality.

Amnesty pointed out that those commitments include reinforcing the fundamental rights of the people, safeguarding women's rights, the appointment of an independent commission to solve the problems of the internally displaced, de-politicising the armed forces, and addressing issues of freedom of movement and access to food and medicine for people living in the conflict areas.

"One of the key issues for the new government is impunity. In order to prevent human rights violations and secure the confidence of the people, security forces must be held to account for the abuses they commit. The Prime Minister must clarify the government's policy on this when he addresses parliament," Amnesty said.

"In the past, investigations have proceeded very slowly, and in relation to some violations such as torture, including rape, no member of the security forces has ever been convicted," Amnesty said, urging the PM to "to issue a clear and unequivocal declaration that human rights violations will never be tolerated and that those responsible will be held to account."

"Over the years, many expert bodies, ... have made recommendations for the prevention of grave human rights violations such as 'disappearances'. The new government should revisit these recommendations and take action to implement them," Amnesty said. "In particular, the government should prioritise a review of the Prevention of Terrorism Act."

Planned negotiations with the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) could also bring about an improved human rights situation in the country, Amnesty said, cautioning that "any agreements reached should guarantee the security of Sri Lankan people and establish a system of justice and equality before the law."

Amnesty International also asked for assurances that executions will not be resumed, as was the practice during 17 years of UNP government and said the London-based organization hoped to continue its substantive dialogue about human rights with the new administration and looked forward to receiving a response to the letter.

Covert Operation Unit's Cover Blown

Was it bungling on a monumental scale, or was it the result of internecine warfare between factions in Sri Lanka's security apparatus?

The arrest and detention of members of a Long Range Reconnaissance Patrol (LRRP) group, despite efforts by the Army's high command to prevent the raid on the soldiers' safe house, has blown the cover of an important covert operation to assassinate senior members of the LTTE. The raid on the group's safe house and the arrests were carried out on suspicion they were planning to assassinate the Prime Minister, Ranil Wickremasinghe.

Giving graphic details, "The Sunday Times" reported that Five soldiers, including a captain, and a Tamil informant alleged to be a former cadre of the LTTE, along with a large quantity of weapons were taken into custody from a safe house in Athurugirya rented by the military. Along with small arms, anti-tank weapons and several claymore mines, sixty-six new LTTE uniforms were also found at the house.

The soldiers taken into custody were being detained under the Prevention of Terrorism Act and interrogated at a secret location in Kandy. They were all said to be held in a single room located close to an unhygienic toilet, the paper said.

Sri Lanka' Interior Minister, John Amaratunga, justified the raid by a combined team of civil and military police and said that initial details pointed to a plan by soldiers, loyal to former deputy defence minister Gen. Anuruddha Ratwatte, to assassination Mr Wickremesinghe.

During the election campaign, the United National Party (UNP) alleged that thermobaric weapons had been brought from the operational areas in the North to the Panaluwa Army Testing Range and that cadres attached to a Northern Tamil Political Party were being trained in their use. The training, the UNP alleged, was being coordinated by the Directorate of Military Intelligence (DMI) together with Army instructors specially flown from the north with the intention of using these weapons on the meetings held by the UNP leadership and their leader's campaign bus.

The Sunday Times learnt that men who were trained at Panaluwa were those engaged in the LRRP operations based at the Athurugirya safe house. However, the newspaper accused a group within the DMI of being responsible for instigating the raid on the location for political gain. The paper also said that SLA chief Lt. Gen. Balagalle telephoned Police Chief Lucky Kodituwakku to call off the raid, but was unsuccessful.

The Sunday Times revealed that the SLA unit had carried out its operations from the safe house in Athrugiriya, penetrating deep within LTTE held territory. Their area of activity was the Batticaloa district. They were assisted in crossing the lines by the Special Task Force (STF), the counter-insurgency arm of the police, the Sunday Times said.

The Liberation Tigers' political lea-der, Mr. S.P Thamil Chelvan was the target of two failed assassination attempts by SLA deep penetration teams, one of which was while he was en route to meet a Norwegian peace delegation for talks.

LRRP teams are also responsible for the assassination of Lt Col. Nizam (Tha-mbirasa Kuhasanthan) the LTTE Military Intelligence Wing leader for the East, reported the Sunday Times. The killing of Col. Shankar, a close confida-nte of LTTE leader, Vellupillai Pirapaharan, was another high profile assassination attributed to LRRP units.

The Sunday Times newspaper said the LRRP teams work with ex-LTTE cadres. In the past, some of these cadres have turned out to be infiltrators. A trooper of a Sri Lanka army deep penetration group was killed by another member of the unit in August last year, who then escaped into LTTE held territory. Three senior operatives of the unit conducting deep penetration raids in the Batticaloa district were killed in a suicide bomb attack in the heart of Batti-caloa town on 15 November last year.

The LRRP unit members have been hailed as national heroes by the SLA, which has expressed dismay at their arrest and subsequent treatment in the hands of the police. "These soldiers had in the past risked their lives for the sake of safeguarding the territorial integrity and sovereignty of the motherland," the Sri Lanka Army said in an official statement.

It is reported that morale in SLA had been hit hard by the arrests. "The morale of the army is very low after this incident. It is sad the way these people are treated and it is definitely a victory for the LTTE," the on-line Lanka Academic quoted on one officer as saying. "Why are the people keeping quiet when we are treated like this?" asked another. "The situation should have been handled in a more matured manner," a high-ranking Army source told the Lanka Academic.

The Sunday Times' respected defence columnist, Iqbal Athas, echoed the SLA's sentiment. "All of them [LRRP troopers] are in one room and have to tolerate the ignominy of a stinking toilet whilst they answer questions from their interrogators."

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NEWS TRACK

LTTE declares month-long ceasefire: 19 Dec - The LTTE in an official statement issued today from its headquarters in Vanni, northern Sri Lanka, announced the declaration of a month long "unilateral cessation of hostilities" as a goodwill measure during the festive season "to facilitate and promote initiatives towards a peace process." The LTTE's observation of cease-fire begins at midnight on Christmas Eve, 24 December 2001, the organisation said in a press release. The LTTE said if the Sri Lankan government "reciprocates positively to our goodwill gesture and ceases armed hostilities against our forces and takes immediate steps to remove the economic embargo and other restrictions," it will favourably consider extending the period of cease-fire.

"Mr. Velupillai Pirapaharan, the leader and military commander of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam, has issued orders to all units and combat formations of the Tamil liberation army to cease all hostile military actions against the Sri Lankan armed forced from midnight 24 December 2001 till midnight 24 January 2002," the LTTE's statement declared.

Three panels to aid pece process: 19 Dec - Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe has set up three ministerial committees to oversee the peace process after meeting his new cabinet to discuss the possibility of talks with the LTTE - one committee would advise him on a political solution, the second committee to arrange the preparatory work for negotiations, and the third to look for alternative solutions.

Tamil Conference Urges Solution to the Ethnic Conflict: 19 Dec - Five hundred delegates from world over gathered for a three-day conference that commenced on December 14 at Johannesburg in South Africa. The conference was organized by the South African Tamil Federation and International Movement for Tamil Culture. Delegates from over 15 countries including Australia, Britain, Canada, Germany, India, Malaysia, Norway, Singapore, Sri Lanka and Switzerland attended the conference. On the final day, the conference appealed to several countries including Tamil Nadu, a State in the southern part of India, which is home to over sixty million Tamils, to help find a peaceful solution to the ethnic conflict in the island of Sri Lanka. The conference further appealed to the LTTE and the Sri Lankan Government to come to the negotiating table in order to resolve the ethnic conflict.

EPDP abandons PA for UNF: 19 Dec – The Eelam People's Democratic Party (EPDP), until recently a key Parliamentary ally of the former People's Alliance (PA) government of President Chandrika Kumaratunga, is offering to switch sides and support the newly elected United National Front (UNF), press reports said. The Gulf News reported that the EPDP, widely accused of violence and intimidation in support of the former administration before and during the December 5 polls is now offering to assist the UNF's efforts at forming a government of national government.

The EPDP's leader, Douglas Devananda, a hitherto staunch ally of President Kumaratunga conveyed to the UNF leader, Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe, in a weekend meeting that he would support his efforts to settle the ethnic issue, improve the economy and introduce constitutional reforms,î the Gulf News reported.

UNP Jaffna district MP and Hindu Affairs Minister T. Maheswaran, during his campaign repeatedly vowed that the UNF government would disarm all armed Tamil paramilitary groups including the EPDP within weeks of their victory at the December 5, parliamentary elections. The TNA, comprising four main Tamil parties has also campaigned for the same action.

Australia Bans LTTE: 21 Dec – The Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) have been included in the list of "terrorist organisations" and their assets frozen in Australia. A statement from the Australian government said, "We have today listed in the Australian Government Gazette the names of terrorists and terrorist organisations whose assets must be frozen by the holder of those assets under the Charter of the United Nations (Anti-terrorism Measures) Regulations 2001. Our listing of these names implements Australia's obligation under UN Security Council Resolution 1373 of 28 September 2001 to suppress the financing of terrorism. All countries are required to take these steps as part of global efforts to combat terrorism. This action shows the Governments commitment to Australia playing its part to ensure that we do not become a financial haven for terrorists."

Suicide rate rise in NE: 20 Dec - "The rate of suicide and attempted suicide is on the increase in northeast province. The time has come for the provincial authorities to take immediate steps to arrest this trend by educating internally displaced persons and refugees through field officers of the social services department", said Mr. S. Amirthalingam, Secretary to the Northeast Provincial Ministry of Rehabilitation, Reconstruction and Social Welfare inaugurating a three day workshop for social services and probation officers in Trincomalee from 19 to 21 December.

Meanwhile, the North East Provincial Council (NEPC) directed all divisional social service officers and childcare and probation officers in the province to submit reports immediately about internally displaced persons and refugees who have committed suicide and attempted to commit suicide due to war and war related factors.

Addressing the second day workshop, Provincial Director of Social Services Mr. M. S. M. Croos said, "refugees and internally displaced living in welfare camps and other places think that they have no future at all due to the continuing brutal war. Hence they are driven to the state of committing suicide due to frustration and desperation. Social service officers and probation officers should visit places where internally displaced and refugees live and make them realize that the rash act of committing suicide would not solve the problem. Instead, in the long run, it would create more hardships for their children and relatives."

Govt announces ceasefire: 21 Dec - The Sri Lankan government to responded to the ceasefire unilaterally declared by the Liberation Tigers by announcing a ceasefire from midnight 24 December to 24 January. The month long ceasefire declared by the LTTE also comes into effect from the midnight of 24 December. The United National Front government sources said that the ceasefire announcement was initially expected to be made following Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe's return from Delhi.

The press release issued by the Prime Minister's office Friday evening in this regard follows: "The United National Front (UNF) has received an overwhelming mandate from all the communities in Sri Lanka to achieve a negotiated political solution within an undivided Sri Lanka. Consequently the Government, as part of its initiative to bring about an atmosphere conducive to invigorating the peace process, will take immediate and concrete steps to improve living conditions for civilians in the uncleared areas. The Government welcomes the announcement of 19th December by the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam and, as a goodwill measure to facilitate peace, will observe a cessation of hostilities from midnight 24th December 2001 until midnight 24th January 2002. A detailed statement on the initiatives of the Government will be issued shortly."

JVP objects to lifting LTTE ban: 22 Dec - Mr. Wimal Weeravamsha, spokesman and senior leader of Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna (JVP), said on December 20 that they would not cooperate with the Sri Lankan Government unless LTTE gave up

their demand for a separate state, hand over arms in a stipulated period of time and give an assurance that they would not take up weapons again. He said that the Tamil Tigers are worried due to the ban on them by several countries including Sri Lanka and India. The LTTE would attempt to de-proscribe the ban in these countries by holding talks with the Sri Lankan Government. The Tamil Tigers should be defeated through military means, and every patriotic Sri Lankan is yearning for it. LTTE's ideology is a danger to the sovereignty and integrity of the Sinhala Nation, he said. Mr. Weeravamsha added that the Tamil Tigers are trying hard to show the international community that they are not terrorists rather they are freedom fighters fighting for the rights of Tamils. The JVP also has put up posters all over the country demanding that the government should not lift the ban on the LTTE.

Journalist Sivaram assaulted: 27 Dec - Mr.Dharmaratnam.Sivaram, a leading Tamil journalist and Mr.Wijetharan, of 'Thinakathir' editorial were wounded when they were attacked by unidentified men, around 10.30 p.m. Wednesday. The journalists were attacked by men armed with clubs who had arrived in a van to the Thinakathir office, a independent Tamil daily published in Batticaloa. Hospital sources said Mr.Sivaram sustained injuries to his head. The gang fled from the scene before police arrived.The Thinakathir office was also damaged, sources said.

PM requests Norway's assistance: 27 Dec - Sri Lanka's Prime Minister Mr. Ranil Wickremasinghe officially requested the government of Norway to recommence its facilitator role with regards to bringing about negotiations with the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE). Mr. Wickremasinghe made his request in a telephone conversation with the Norwegian Prime Minister, a press communiqué released by the Prime Minister's office in Colombo said.

LTTE should prove its credibility: 27 Dec - The general Secretary of the United National Party (UNP) - the main constituent of the ruling United National Front (UNF) - Mr.Senarath Kapukotuwa said that no decision has been taken in regard to lifting the ban imposed on the LTTE in Sri Lanka. The decision to lift the ban would be taken depending on the credibility of the future actions of the LTTE, he said.

"The LTTE should prove its credibility not only by words but also by deeds. The ban imposed on the LTTE by some foreign countries could not be compared with the ban on it in Sri Lanka. Sri Lankan government did not ban the LTTE locally when it requested the international community to ban it in their countries," Mr. Kapukotuwa pointed out. He made this observation in response to a statement made by the Marxist Janata Vimukthi Peramuna (JVP), third largest political party represented in the new parliament that the ban on LTTE in Sri Lanka should be only be lifted after it abandoned its separate state policy and surrendered its arms.

Election violence tally 2955: 29 Dec -The incidents of election related violence totalled 2955 by 28 December, the Police Elections Secretariat said. The complaints received by police stations islandwide since October 10, the day of nominations for the general election have continued to flow in even after the election concluded on December 5. However, the Secretariat said that no complaints have been received since December 24. Prior to the election the Police Elections Secretariat reported a total 2132 complaints. The number of post-election violence incidents amounted to 447. While on the day of the election the incidents of violence was a massive 376. The total number of deaths during this period was 58.

Conflict deprives children's education: 30 Dec - Most of the children under the age of ten living in welfare centres, slum areas and remote villages in the North-East province, have been deprived of their pre-school and primary education due to the ongoing war, said Mr.Sokkalingam Amirthalingam, Provincial Secretary to the Ministry of Rehabilitation, Reconstruction, Social Welfare and Women Affairs, addressing a three-day workshop on the Early Childhood Development Project.

"Pre-school education lays a firm foundation for the betterment of the younger generation in the sphere of education. Due to the present war, thousands of children live in refugee camps, welfare centres and in shanties, losing the opportunity for obtaining pre-school and primary education," said Mr.Amirthalingam, participating as the chief guest of the event. Pre-school teachers who attended the workshop were briefed of the urgent necessity of providing better attention to children under ten who have been displaced or separated from their parents or who have lost their parents in the ongoing war and living in refugee camps, welfare centres and other institutions.

Local elections on March 1: 1 Jan - The United National Front government has decided to hold the local government elections on March 1 this year, including in the north-east province, authoritative sources said. Elections to fourteen municipal councils, thirty-eight urban councils and two hundred and fifty eight 'pradeshiya sabhas' (village level councils) would be held on the same day, UNF government said.

Of these local institutions, three municipal councils, four urban councils and seventy-four pradesiya sabahs are in the northeast province, election department said. The Commissioner of Elections will notify the dates for submitting nominations very shortly, officials said.

The life term of the local government bodies in the northeast province was extended last year by then the People's Alliance government for another one year, which would end in April 2001. However the government appointed State officials as authorized officers to run these councils instead of holding fresh elections. Councils elected by the people now run the local government institutions in the other seven provinces.

LTTE leader writes to Norway PM: 2 Jan - Mr Velupillai Pirapaharan, the leader of the LTTE has written to the Norwegian Prime Minister Mr Kjell Magne Bondevik, calling for Norway's continuous engagement as the facilitator between the LTTE and the new Sri Lanka government to find a peaceful settlement to the ethnic conflict. In a press release, the LTTE said on 2 January. Mr. Pirapaharan also complimented the Royal Norwegian Government for its impartial and neutral approach in the facilitatory process. The statement also said a Norwegian delegation headed by Mr Helgeson, the Deputy Foreign Minister, will meet Mr Anton Balasingham, the official spokesman and chief negotiator for the LTTE in London on 4 January.

Embargo eased: 2 Jan - Sri Lanka's Defence Ministry said that it would allow the transport of restricted amount of diesel, petrol, cement and steel bars to the areas held by the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) in the North-East province effective January 15. The ministry said that it would allow other essential food items and medicines to be transported to the LTTE held areas, except illegal arms, ammunitions, explosives, remote control equipments, barbed wire, pen torch batteries and telescopic equipment. The Defense Ministry further said that logistical arrangements to ensure smooth implementation of this decision are currently being worked out, and will be in place within the next two weeks.

PA supporters debarred from workplaces: 2 Jan - Peoples Alliance MP and trade union activist, Alavi Mowlana yesterday led a delegation of PA trade union leaders to a meeting with the chairman of the Human Rights Commission to seek remedial action for about 1000 PA supporters employed in the state sector who are being debarred from their work places allegedly by the main UNP trade union the Jatika Sevaka Sangamaya (JSS). Members of the Joint Council Trade Union Organisation who met with the Human Rights Commission (HRC) Chairman, Faiz Mustafa comprised unions leaders of the Ceylon Transport Board (CTB), the Railway Department and the Petroleum Corporation.

Military steps up recruitment: 6 Jan - The new United National Front (UNF) ad-

ministration has authorised its military and police to continue with recruitment drives aimed at strengthening the fighting forces, according to newspaper reports from Colombo. The elite police commando unit, the Special Task Force (STF), today launched a major new recruitment drive to strengthen its forces deployed in the north and east , reports said quoting authoritative defence sources. The STF's campaign comes amid a major drive by the Sri Lanka Army's regular infantry divisions and Special Forces, as well as the Sri Lanka Air Force (SLAF). Walk-in-interviews for applicants to the STF will begin at Chilaw public ground, and interviews will continue until January 29 at 18 different towns including Ampara. Over the past few days, police commandos put up colourful posters in Colombo and provinces to urge youth to join them.

The defence sources told the Island that the recruitment campaigns were "routine," adding that even if the ongoing Norwegian efforts to revive the peace process succeed, both police and security forces must continue with previously scheduled recruitment.

EPDP MP surrenders: 7 Jan - Mr. Nadarajah Mathanarajah of the Eelam People's Democratic Party (EPDP) who was elected as a Member of Parliament for Jaffna at the general elections on 5 December last year surrendered to the Jaffna court on 7 January. Mr. Mathanarajah, a close confidante of the EPDP leader Mr. Douglas Devananda was wanted by the courts in connection with the attack on Tamil National Alliance candidates and supporters on 28 November in which two were killed. The EPDP has two seats in the Sri Lankan Parliament.

LTTE suggests Indian venue for talks: 8 Jan - The Tamil Tigers have suggested to the Norwegian government that future negotiations with the Sri Lankan government could be held in southern India, press reports said. The Hindu and the Tamil Guardian reported that the LTTE's suggestion is being conveyed to the Sri Lankan and Indian governments by a Norwegian delegation expected in South Asia later this week.

"With Sri Lankan territory deemed unsuitable given the inherent security concerns and the health requirements of the LTTE's chief negotiator and political advisor, Mr Anton Balasingham, south India was an ideal location," the London-based paper quoted the LTTE as telling the Norwegian government.

"Security considerations, convenience and proximity to homeland," motivated the LTTE suggestion, The Hindu reported, quoting informed Tamil sources. The Hindu said the LTTE requires Indian assistance in two phases. "First, it wants New Delhi to allow its political adviser and chief negotiator, Anton Balasingham, and spouse, Adele Anne, to reside temporarily in Chennai before and during talks with the Sri Lankan Government," the paper said. "Second, it wants India to extend its good offices further and let the talks facilitated by Norway to be conducted in a South Indian city such as Chennai, Thiruvananthapuram or Bangalore."

Negotiations based in India would permit negotiators on both sides to shuttle rapidly for consultations with their respective leaderships in Colombo and the Vanni, the LTTE had pointed out to the Norwegian team, according to the Tamil Guardian. As the regional power, India has important interests in ensuring that a lasting solution to the Sri Lankan conflict is achieved at the earliest opportunity and the provision of a suitable venue would prove invaluable assistance, it quoted the LTTE as having said.

In its editorial column, the Tamil Guardian said, "From India's perspective, the hosting of such talks should be a relatively uncomplicated matter. As the regional power, India justifiably has vested interests in both securing a speedy negotiated outcome to Sri Lanka's conflict and in the nature of the settlement itself," adding that, "Regional authority, geographical proximity and vested interests provide compelling reasons for the necessity of India's assistance in this regard."

Jaffna students warn of protests: 9 Jan - The Jaffna Technical College Students' Union (JTCSU) has appealed to the Prime Minister, Mr.Ranil Wickremesinghe, to take immediate steps to release Jaffna university student Mr. Krishnasamy Thivyan who has been detained since 2 July 2001. "Students of the Jaffna Technical College and Jaffna Higher Technical Institute would organise a mass agitation in the peninsula if Thivyan is not released immediately," the JTCSU said in a memorandum sent to Mr.Ranil Wickremasinghe on 9 January.

TNA meets Norway delegation: 10 Jan – During its meeting with the visiting Norwegian delegation on 10 January, the Tamil National Alliance (TNA) representatives reiterated their that the ban imposed on the LTTE in Sri Lanka should be lifted immediately to facilitate the commencement of peace negotiations.

The Norwegian delegation was led by Deputy Foreign Minister Vidar Helgeson. It included special envoy Erik Solheim and a foreign ministry official Kjersto Tromsbl.

The delegation of the TNA included Messrs R Sampanthan, V.Anandasangaree, Joseph Pararajasingham, A.Vinayagamoorthy, K.Gajendrakumar, E.Thangavadivelu, Sivasakthi Ananthan and a former parliamentarian Raja Kuhaneswaran.

Strictly adhering to its election manifesto, the TNA delegation told the Norwegians that "No parallel talks should take place with any other Tamil political formation when negotiating with the LTTE."

TNA's election manifesto had said that "to ensure that the negotiations are properly focussed and are purposeful and successful, no parallel negotiations should take place with any other Tamil political organizations when the Sri Lankan Government negotiating with the LTTE."

Commenting on the TNA's decision not to participate in the proposed peace talks between the SL government and the LTTE, the TNA delegation said that "all efforts of the Tamil moderate leadership to find a just and reasonable political solution to the Tamil national question for the last fifty years had failed due to the lack of comprehension and consistency in the policy of the successive Sinhalese dominated governments in power."

"The moderate Tamil leadership was taken for a ride by the successive governments on the pretext of having negotiations and entering into agreements and pacts. Now we have come to a situation that just and durable political solution could be found to the Tamil national question only with meaningful talks with the LTTE with the international third party involvement," the TNA delegation told the Norwegian team.

President denies knowledge of killings: 11 Jan - President Chandrika Kumaratunga denied the claim made by a CID Superintendent of Police, Bandula Wickremasinghe that he had in a memorandum sent to the President in September 2000 in which he had reportedly given information relating to those responsible for the murders of Tamil Congress leader Kumar Ponnambalam and Satana Editor Rohana Kumara earlier in the same year. Mr. Wickremasinghe's claim was reveled in the Sunday Leader with the suggestion that the President either knew of the murders before they took place, or she came to know about them after they occurred but took no steps to order further investigation. The President in a statement called the allegation a total fabrication. She has asked the police chief to hold an impartial inquiry into this allegation.

Norway's cautious optimism: 11 Jan - The Norwegian peace delegation today expressed cautious optimism over finding a peaceful solution to the ethnic conflict in the island. The delegation leader Mr.Vidar Helgeson, Norway's Deputy Foreign Minister, said there was increased level of confidence between the parties concerned.

The Norwegian delegation left Colombo on 11 January after two days' talks with President Chandrika Kumaratunge, Prime Minister Ranil Wickremasinghe and leaders of several Tamil and Muslim political parties. The Norwegian delegation in its talks with the government leaders discussed in detail the outcome of the talks it held earlier with Dr.Anton Balasingham, political advisor of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam in London. Helgeson further said that the proposed peace process would be challenging, and both parties would face difficulties.

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LTTE dismisses Nepal: 12 Jan - The LTTE's chief negotiator and political advisor, Mr. Anton Balasingham, Saturday dismissed press reports suggesting that the LTTE and the government were looking at Nepal as a suitable venue for negotiations. Mr. Balasingham said the Himalayan kingdom was logistically "completely unsuitable" as a venue for peace talks.

In Sri Lanka ehe Daily Mirror newspaper said of "possibility of holding the proposed peace talks ... in Kathmandu is being looked into by both parties."

"Earlier, there was consensus over a venue in India as a logical choice. However, objections raised by several political groups in Tamil Nadu there forced the parties concerned to look for an alternative venue," the paper claimed, adding that several Indian satellite TV channels quoted an LTTE spokesman in Paris as saying the LTTE was considering Nepal as an suitable venue. However, Mr. Balasingham emphatically denied that there was agreement on a suitable venue with the Sri Lankan government. He also said that logistical considerations ruled out Nepal and said southern India was the most practical location from the perspective of both sides' negotiators.

Ranil assures of peace with no separation: 12 Jan - Prime Minister Ranil Wickremasinghe gave an assurance that the UNF Government was committed to ending the ethnic conflict while preserving the territorial integrity of the country. Addressing the 47th annual convention of the UNP on 12 January, he said the UNF Government would usher an era of peace and prosperity ending the ethnic strife begun in 1983. He added: "I will bring about a settlement of the problem which is acceptable to every citizen in the country."

Emphasizing the difficulties in the peace process, the Prime Minister said: "The road to peace and national harmony is not easy. We have to go a long way to achieve peace. But we cannot run fast. It is a difficult path to pass and it is slippery. The road is full of damages and pot holes, and we are passing through this arduous thoroughfare to bring about peace and harmony to our motherland, without dividing the country."

Speaking in a note of warning clearly directed at the JVP, that has announced a campaign to oppose the peace process, the Prime Minister said: "I will assure you I will not let anybody to set fire to the country once again under the pretext of protest to the path we have taken." He blamed those who added fuel to the fire of communal hatred in the late '80s during the regime of President J. R. Jayewardene. Again alluding to the violent protests led by the JVP and supported by the SLFP in 1987 he said, "I would not have to face a problem of this magnitude if those who set fire in 1987 supported the then government when the Indo-Sri Lanka Pact was signed."

Vanni ban relaxed: 15 Jan - Six hundred civilians would be permitted to travel from the LTTE held Vanni region through the Sri Lanka army's entry point at Piramanaalankulam from Monday to Friday under new regulations issued by the Sri Lankan government which came into effect 15 January as part of a move to ease the 12 year old embargo and travel restrictions in the war torn northern parts of the island.

Earlier, only seven hundred were allowed to come through on Tuesdays and Fridays. Six hundred would be allowed into the Vanni during weekdays from army held areas; and the draconian red tape that civilians had to face in obtaining clearance from the SLA for travelling to the Vanni from other parts of the island have been eased.

Court rejects Ratwatte applications: 15 Jan - The Supreme Court today rejected the two fundamental rights applications filed by the two sons, Lohan and Chanuka of former Deputy Defense Minister and presently Kandy District Parliamentarian General Anurudha Ratwatte. In their FR applications they sought order preventing their arrest by the police in connection with the massacre of ten Muslim men at Madawella

on the election day, December 5 last year.

The Chief Justice Mr.Sarath N.Silva rejecting the FR applications said the SC could not interfere in the magisterial proceeding of the Udathalawinne massacre.

President Counsel Mr.Arthur Samarasekara in support of the FR applications told court that the arrest order made by the Teldeniya Magistrate was without justifiable reason and reliable information. The Deputy Solicitor General Mr. Arasekularatena appeared for the Attorney General argued that the police was in possession of vital evidence in regard to the involvement of the two petitioners in the alleged Udathalawinne massacre. The Teldeniya Magistrate had made the arrest order against the two petitioners who were the main suspects in the massacre based on such vital information

Norway discusses ceasefire with LTTE: 15 Jan - Efforts to hammer out a permanent stable ceasefire between the Liberation Tigers and the Sri Lanka government continued on 15 January as a Norwegian delegation returned to London to meet the LTTE's chief negotiator and political advisor, Anton Balasingham, following discussions with the government in Colombo.

Erik Solheim, special advisor to the Norwegian Foreign Ministry and Kjirste Tromsdal, an official with the same Ministry, met Mr. Balasingham at his residence in London for three hours. Their discussions centred on the formation of a structured, stable ceasefire. The immediate objective is to convert the unilateral cessations of hostilities being separately observed by both sides into a single stable framework, according to LTTE sources. Until an agreement on a permanent ceasefire is arrived at, Norway has requested the LTTE and the Sri Lankan government to extend their ongoing cessations of hostilities when these expire on January 24.

Release of commandos ordered: 14 Jan - Defence Minister Tilak Marapana today ordered the release of a group of elite commandos engaged in counter-terrorism against Tamil Tiger (LTTE) being held by police on allegations of complicity to assassinate Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe. Marapana ordered the release as mounting criticism, especially in local newspapers, that men belonging to a crack unit of the Sri Lanka army involved in deep-penetration strikes inside LTTE-held jungles are being held in the custody of a police team probing the complicity of former deputy defence minister Gen. Anuruddha Ratwatte in a plot to kill Wickremesinghe.

PTA accused entitled to translation of 'confession': 16 Jan -The East High Court Judge Mr. J. Visvanathan allowed an application made by the defense counsel in a case filed under the Prevention Terrorism Act that a Tamil translation of the confession purported to have been made by the accused should be provided to him (the accused) before the commencement of the proper trial. "It would be a travesty of justice if the inquiry were to be held against the accused without providing him the Tamil translation of his confession", the judge said.

The High Court Judge in his order delivered on 16 January at the Trincomalee sessions of the East High Court said: "In the particular case the confession of the accused has been recorded in Sinhala language. The prosecution is to use the confession against the accused to prove his guilt. A voire-dire inquiry would be held if the defense challenges that the police has obtained the confession by torturing the accused. If the court held after such inquiry that the confession was a voluntary one then it would be used against the accused. It would be considered a travesty of justice if the inquiry were to be held against the accused without providing him the Tamil translation of his confession. Therefore the accused has every right to obtain a Tamil translation of his confession which was recorded in Sinhala language before the commencement of the trial."

Meanwhile, Attorney General has directed the Inspector General of Police to submit the names of those who have been

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detained in several prisons in the country under the Prevention of Terrorism Act. The AG further directed the IGP to furnish the names of those who have been indicted in courts and are being held without any charges in prisons and detention centres. The AG has further directed the IGP to submit the number of PTA cases where the prosecution solely depends on the confession made by the suspects to prove their guiltIn the previous week the Chief Justice directed the Attorney General to take immediate steps to clear the backlog of PTA cases, stating that more than six hundred Tamil youths are languishing in prisons without being charged in courts.

Open sky policy: 17 Jan - Colombo is soon to embrace an open sky policy with no restrictions on the number of Indian carriers flying to Sri Lanka, Arjuna Mahendran, chairman of the Board of Investment said in India today. "He hoped that this would lead to Indian private carriers flying to Colombo", said a statement from the Confederation of Indian Industry (CII). CII is based in Bangalore where it has organised the Partnership Summit 2002, being attended currently by Mahendran. He delivered an address on "Sri Lanka: make a profit in paradise".

Nomination to Constitutional Council: 17 Jan - A retired High Court Judge Mr.T. Suntharalingam has been nominated to the eleven member Constitutional Council which is to be appointed under the 17th amendment to the constitution. Leaders of Tamil political parties represented in the parliament unanimously nominated Mr.Suntharalingam as the representative of the Sri Lanka Tamils in the Constitutional Council. Earlier the Tamil political parties were divided in nominating a representative to represent Sri Lankan Tamils in the constitutional council.

.The decision was conveyed at the meeting of leaders of all political parties held Thursday at the parliamentary complex with Mr.Ranil Wickremasinghe, Prime Minister in the chair. Messrs R.Sampanthan and A.Vinayagamoorthy of Tamil National Alliance, Douglas Devananda of Eelam People's Democratic Party, D.Siddharthan of People's Liberation Organization of Tamil Eelam, Vimal Weerawnse of Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna, Rauff Hakeem of Sri Lanka Muslim Congress, Ratnsiri Wickremasinghe of People's Alliance attended the meeting.

Mr.Suntharalingam joined the Judicial Service as Magistrate and then rose to the position of a High Court Judge. After retirement from the judicial service he served as a commissioner of the Human Rights Commissioner of Sri Lanka for some time.

Court allows rights cases to proceed: 18 Jan - The Supreme Court today granted leave to proceed in six fundamental right violations petitions requesting the Court to order the elections commissioner to hold fresh polls for Wanni and Batticaloe districts. The petitioners say their fundamental rights have been violated when the army closed entry points to voters in the LTTE controlled areas on election day. Tens of thousands of people living in such areas were unable to vote when the army commander in a surprise move closed entry points to army held areas where the polling booths were located

President against lifting LTTE ban: 18 Jan - The Sri Lankan President, Chandrika Kumaratunga, strongly feels the ban on the LTTE should not lifted till the militant outfit gives a solemn undertaking that it will not indulge in political assassinations and terrorist strikes against civilian and economic targets. "I don't think there is reason to hope too much, but one has to keep trying, she said. I strongly believe that any further concessions should be given to the LTTE only after it comes to the negotiating table and lifting the ban before that could be very dangerous and end up in a nought," the President told "The Times of India".

Presidential spokesman Harim Peiris said that there should be a package of reciprocities for meaningful talks to take place and lasting peace to be attained. He then went on to say that the proceedings so far showed an absence of reciprocity on the part of the LTTE. He said a mutually agreed ceasefire was a key element, but it would be meaningless if it did not include an LTTE undertaking to not indulge in terrorist strikes. In return for the government's lifting restrictions on the movement of goods and people into LTTE areas, the LTTE should open up the Vavuniya-Jaffna main supply route.

Would-be migrants arrested: 18 Jan - The Sri Lankan navy has detained two fishing trawlers packed with about 100 people hoping to make the long voyage to Italy. Police said navy gunboats had discovered the trawlers off the coast of the western town of Negombo near the island's only international airport. The seizure comes a week after 108 men were arrested in similar circumstances.

School non-attendance high in N-E: 18 Jan – "It has been estimated that about 14 percent of children between age 5 and 14 do not attend school in Sri Lanka. This is a national average and we all know that non-attendance in many areas in the northeast province is much higher. In some areas as many as one out of five children do not attend schools," said Ms Elroy Gabr-ielle, UNICEF resident representative, addressing the second day North East Provincial Tamil Literary Festival at Trincomalee St.Joseph's College auditorium on 18 January.

LTTE extends unilateral ceasefire 19 Jan - The LTTE in an official statement issued today from its headquarters in Vanni, northern Sri Lanka, extended its unilaterally declared cessation of hostilities for another one month, from midnight 24 January to midnight 24 February 2002. "We have decided to extend the truce for another month as a gesture of peace and goodwill and also to provide further space and time for the Norwegian facilitators to workout terms and conditions for a mutually agreed structured cease-fire. We fervently hope that the Government of Sri Lanka will reciprocate favourably to our goodwill gesture and extend the period of peace accordingly," the LTTE's statement said.The statement added that the LTTE leadership has, through its chief negotiator Mr Anton Balasingham, informed the Royal Norwegian government of its decision to extend the truce and requested the facilitators to convey the decision to the Government of Sri Lanka.

Paskaralingam back: 19 Jan - Controversial former Finance Ministry Secretary R. Paskaralingam who fled to London following the victory of the People's Alliance in August 1994 is said to have returned to Colombo and checked in at the 5-Star Colombo Galadari hotel. Though the People's Alliance government conducted lengthy investigations into alleged illegal dealings of Mr Paskaralingam and others, those they came a cropper when the affected parties successfully challenged the validity of theinvestigations carried out by the Presidential. Colombo newspapers said Mr. Paskaralingam had returned to shoulder some heavy responsibilities under the new UNP regime had booked a room at the hotel for two years.

Thugs Destroy New Pradesheeya Sabha Building: 19 Jan - A group of ruling United National Party (UNP) supporters raided the newly constructed Hingurakgoda Pradesheeya Sabha building while its opening ceremony was under way and destroyed equipment worth Rs. Three hundred thousand. An attempt to set fire to the building was prevented by the workers. The gang, however, was able to break windowpanes, throw excretion on walls and set nearly 300 chairs on fire. It is estimated that Rs. 4.9 million have been spent by the authorities to construct the building. Minister of Local Government and Internal Affairs Earl Gunasekara tried very hard to stop the inauguration ceremony.

India to reject LTTE Request: 20 Jan - The government of India appears to be categorical in rejecting the LTTE's plea for using either Chennai or any other part of the southern States as a venue for peace talks with the Sri Lankan Government. A report in "The Hindu" quoting highly-placed sources said that informal discussions between the Ministries of External Affairs and Home on the subject were recently held and the dominant view was to keep the LTTE at bay from the southern States. In fact, the view in the Home Ministry seems to be that the matter is a closed chapter. ●

News and Comment

By Colombo Correspondent

Strong expectations of peace are very much in the air in Sri Lanka, but it is certainly no heady feeling. Instead it is a feeling of good hope mixed with those of caution and even fear.

The roads in Colombo city and its suburbs are free flowing, with no armed barriers and checkpoints. This has given immense satisfaction to the Tamils in and out of these areas, as they are no more subject to the insults and harassment reserved for them at these places. The Sinhala middle and upper classes are also happy at not having to undergo all the troubles of traffic jams and delayed appointments.

However, there is a also a general air of caution and fear among many who feel this as open door to the LTTE, to bring in its armed cadres and suicide squads into the city, to be in place if and when the proposed peace talks happen to break down - in a replay of earlier situations.

The Government responded swiftly to the LTTE's December 19 announcement of a month long unilateral ceasefire from midnight of December 24, 2001. Barely two weeks after Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe was sworn as Prime Minister, United National Front (UNF) Government responded with a declaration of a cessation of hostilities for the same one-month period, ending midnight January 24, 2002 with the professed hope that the cessation of hostilities could be extended.

It is expected that the unilateral cessation of hostilities will be extended further by both sides until a formal ceasefire is worked out between the parties.

Sharp contrast

This move by the UNF Government and Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe is in sharp contrast to the manner in which the PA Government under President Chandrika Kumaratunga responded to a similar unilateral ceasefire declared by the LTTE for one month from December 24, 2000. The PA Government did not accept the "unilateral ceasefire" as genuine, as it was not informed through the Norwegian facilitators. It further refused to accept the LTTE's unilateral extension of the ceasefire for two more months thereafter. Instead, after the LTTE announced that it was ending its unilateral ceasefire in March 2001, the security forces launched a massive attack on the LTTE barely 48 hours after the announcement in the operation named "Agni Kheela One". The result was massive casualties among both government troops and LTTE cadres, compelling the government troops to retreat to positions behind what they had earlier held. This lack of response to the LTTE's unilateral ceasefire by the PA Government, was one of the major de-stabilizing factors in the peace process which then was on with Norwegian facilitation. However, the LTTE too did contribute to the virtual end of the peace process shortly after, with its sudden impositions of preconditions for talks - mainly the lifting of its proscription.

Free flow of goods

The UNF Government has been quick to respond positively to the LTTE's demand for the creation of better conditions for peace. It decided to lift the ban on most of the 21 items not allowed to the North; particularly the LTTE held or "uncleared" areas in the Vanni. Plenty of goods, earlier banned, now appear to be moving freely to these areas, easing the conditions of life of the people.

Removal of restrictions

Another confidence building move for talks is the removal of restrictions on civilians in the Vanni areas under the control of the LTTE crossing the Piramanakulam checkpoint to enter government controlled areas for their requirements. This checkpoint will be opened five days a week - Monday to Friday - from January 15, 2002. Under proposed arrangements 600 persons from the LTTE controlled areas will be allowed from Piramanakulam each day, totaling 3,000 persons a week, in contrast to the 700 civilians allowed access on two days of the week. Goods transportation from this point so far restricted to only one day a week, will soon be allowed on four days with much less restrictions, The crossing will also be open for patients needing urgent medical attention on Saturdays and Sundays, too. These moves are expected to bring much relief to at least 350,000 Tamil people estimated to be living in LTTE controlled areas of the Vanni.

Although there is considerable free flow of goods to the North today, there is the notable absence of the euphoria of peace in Jaffna, that prevailed when there was a similar easing of restrictions and moves towards peace by President Chandrika Kumaratunga, both as Prime Minister in October 1994, and later after being elected President in November 1994. There are no pro-Ranil baubles on display in Jaffna today, unlike the "Chandrika' bangles and trinkets that were the fashion on the earlier occasion.

The Hindu festival of "Thai Pongal" on January 14 is targeted by government peace strategists to make the most impression on the people of the North of the sincerity of its intentions for peace. Minister Jayalath Jayawardana, who is in charge of Rehabilitation & Reconstruction, will pay a special visit to the North on this day. He is expected to meet with parents of government troops held by the LTTE, permitted to travel to the North in efforts to gain the possible release of these prisoners. Minister Jayawardana is one who is believed to have maintained close links with the LTTE when the UNP was in opposition. In those days he was much maligned as a 'secret agent' of the Tamil Tigers and even his movements were subjected to scrutiny by the intelligence agencies.

Delegations from the Ceylon Chamber of Commerce and the Federation of the Chambers of Commerce & Industries of Sri Lanka have also visited Jaffna for talks with the Jaffna Chamber of Commerce for improved trade.

The Norwegian initiative

No sooner the LTTE announced its unilateral ceasefire, Prime Minister Ranil Wicremasinghe took immediate steps to revive the Norwegian initiative in the peace process that has been stalled from April last year, after the LTTE insisted that no talks would be possible unless the ban imposed on it in 1998 is lifted. As President Chandrika Kumaratunga's PA government had already upgraded the level of Norwegian involvement to one with the Norwegian Government itself, Prime Minister Wickremasinghe lost no time in telephoning the Norwegian Prime Minister, and requesting assistance in reviv-

ing the peace process. Following a positive response from the Norwegian Prime Minister to the Sri Lankan Premier's request, there was a similar request to the Norwegian Government by the LTTE leader Velupillai Pirubaharan too, which also received a welcome response. Consequently, a special three member Norwegian delegation led by Deputy Foreign Minister Mr. Vider Helgessen, accompanied by former facilitator and special peace envoy Erik Solheim and another Norwegian Foreign Ministry official arrived in Sri Lanka on January 10. They met President Chandrika Kumaratunga and briefed her on developments, in addition to their meeting with Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe.

The presence of peace envoy Erik Solheim in the delegation seems significant, as in the latter stages of the Norwegian facilitation last year, President Kumaratunga and former Foreign Minister Mr. Lakshman Kadirgamar took exception to the role he was playing, specially in giving interviews to the media. The Norwegian delegation also met former Foreign Minister Lakshman Kadirgamar, as well as, members of the Tamil National Alliance led by the TULF, and the Sri Lanka Muslim Congress (SLMC) led by Mr. Rauff Hakeem, the latter now in the ruling UNF. The Norwegians had expressed satisfaction at the increase in goodwill and heightened interest in the peace process. However, they expressed caution and warned of many challenges that lay ahead.

The TNA delegation informed the Norwegians reiterated their already known position that the proscription of the LTTE should be lifted before any negotiations begin, and that any negotiations should be between the Government and the LTTE alone. The SLMC leader Rauff Hakeem, while emphasizing its support for the peace process, urged that all Muslims displaced from the North and East by the LTTE should be allowed to return to their traditional home areas, as part of any settlement.

The Norwegians have left Sri Lanka and are now due to have an early meeting with Anton Balasingham with regard to progress in negotiations.

PM's Indian Visit

Prime Minister Wickremesinghe made India the venue of his first official visit abroad as Prime Minister. It was a high profile visit with much publicity during which the Prime Minister met and discussed matters with the President Prime Minister of India and other Ministers He also met former Prime Minister Narasimha Rao and Congress leader Mrs Sonia Gandhi. He sought India's active support for and role in the peace process he was recommencing with Norwegian facilitation. While India agreed to support the peace process, specially through Norwegian facilitation, it was not ready to give any other assurances in regard to any role it would play other than to express the view that it would always support any political settlement of the ethnic conflict that respected the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Sri Lanka. According to political observers both in Colombo and in India, his Indian counterpart, Atal Behari Vajpayee and other Indian leaders, had expressed reluctance in regard to the Sri Lankan Premier's attempt to get India more heavily committed to the peace process.

LTTE's intriguing suggestion

Outwardly, LTTE chief negotiator Anton Balasingham's suggestion to hold proposed peace talks with the Sri Lankan government in Chennai or in another South Indian city, looked innocuous. But senior politicians and seasoned commentators saw it as a "transparent ploy." However, some others consider that such a move could positively help peace talks by providing it the venue and shelter to LTTE negotiator and his wife.

Balasingham is said to have told his Norwegian facilitators that geographical proximity, availability of medical care and communication facilities which he constantly needed and satisfying India's concerns as a region super-power were the factors that prompted his suggestion. According to him, 'southern India was the most practical location from the perspective of both sides' negotiators. "Inevitably, the smooth and productive progress of talks would require close coordination between the [negotiation] teams and their respective leaderships," Balasingham said.

"Outwardly the reasons look fine. Were they Balasingham's only concerns or something else?" a Colombo based commentator queried.

In Tamil Nadu, where Balasingham's suggestion attracted much publicity, including an editorial from The Hindu, the reaction was sharply critical. Tamil Nadu Chief Minister, Panneerselvam wrote to Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee, conveying the state government's "unequivocal" opposition to granting shelter to Balasingham and his wife, Adele, in Chennai given LTTE's "past track record of spreading its dangerous tentacles over the entire state." He added: "It is too dangerous to think of allowing the LTTE to get even a toe-hold, let alone a foot-hold in Tamil Nadu, even ostensibly for the purpose of peace talks."

"This is a very sensitive issue having far reaching and dangerous implications for the security of India and as such we, therefore, cannot give our consent to such an arrangement at all," he said.

To others like T. N. Gopalan, a veteran commentator on Indo-Sri Lankan affairs, and Tamil Nadu leaders of the Congress party, LTTE's involvement in the murder of Rajiv Gandhi and waging war against the Indian Peace Keeping Force (IPKF) were the main considerations. ''I'm aghast at the LTTE's audacity,'' exclaimed Gopalan. "'To even think that they could be permitted back... after having fought the Indian army and humiliated it, their psyche is truly mind-boggling,'' Gopalan said.

For Janatha Party leader Subramanian Swamy, an inveterate opponent of the LTTE, it is a "terrorist organisation banned in India for killing the former Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi." He threatened to "go to the Supreme Court" to challenge any move by the federal government to allow peace talks on Indian soil.

India outlawed the LTTE in the early 1990s, blaming it for assassinating former Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi at an election rally in Tamil Nadu in 1991 - a charge denied by the Tigers. Tamil Nadu, home to a 62-million strong Tamil community, which was generously supportive of Sri Lankan Tamils and where the Tamil militant groups including the LTTE had their basesin the 1980s, became virtually a no-go area for the LTTE after the assassination. Balasingham is said to have admitted, in recent years, the killing of Rajiv Gandhi was a "historical blunder."

Other political commentators in Tamil Nadu are concerned about India's failed efforts at brokering peace. Between 1987 and 1990, India lost 1,150 troops, part of a peace-keeping force sent by Rajiv Gandhi in July 1987 in a protracted military confrontation with the Tigers after he had brokered a peace accord with Colombo to end the ethnic conflict in Sri Lanka.

There are a few voices strongly sym-

pathetic to the LTTE in Vajpayee's ruling coalition who have urged the Prime Minister to consider positively Balasingham's suggestion. Senior MDMK leader and Union Minister of State for Non-Conventional Energy M Kannappan said there was nothing wrong in allowing Balasingham to camp at Chennai or any other city and in facilitating peace talks. "The opportunity mooted cannot be denied when the entire world is yearning for peace," he said and added that it was up to the Indian Prime Minister to take a final decision on the matter.

Tamizhar Desiya Iyakkam leader, P. Nedumaran, favoured Indian facilitation of peace talks and the provision of accommodation to Balasingham family.

DMK president M Karunanidhi, embroiled in a series of disputes with his arch rival Jayalalitha, has taken a cautious stand. He said it was a matter in which the Centre has to take a decision and assured that his government would abide by that it.

Sri Lankan analysts have looked at Balasingham's suggestion from a broader perspective. They say Balasingham's proposition has raised "awkward" questions for New Delhi on the role it wants to play in the Sri Lankan peace process.

A former militant L. Ketheeswaran of the private Centre for Policy Alternatives (CPA), says Balasingham "seems to be exploring ways for a return to legitimacy in India," Once Balasingham was given permission to stay in Chennai and it became the venue for the peace talks Indian involvement in the peace process would become "inevitable", he said.

That would certainly make New Delhi take up the role of mediator or guarantor. "But it is an entirely different matter whether this will be in India's interests. That is something that India has to consider closely," Ketheeswaran said.

The former diplomat, Nanda Godage, shared a similar view, adding that the suggestion provided India an opportunity to clarify the role it wanted to play in the Sri Lankan conflict. "India should come in and play a much more positive role than just playing host to Balasingham. But if they do not want to do that, this is the chance for them to make it absolutely clear," Godage said, arguing that the signals emerging from New Delhi on this had always been "mixed".

Another political commentator, Sunday Times editor Sinha Ratnatunga, said that if New Delhi turned down the LTTE request, it ran the risk of contradicting itself on its declared support for the peace process in Sri Lanka. "It is obvious that the LTTE is trying to get a foothold in India and win back legitimacy despite the ban on it, but it has landed a hot potato in New Delhi's lap," he said. "As far as the Sri Lankan Government is concerned, it does not matter if they talk to the LTTE in London or Chennai. This is now India's problem. It is a bit awkward for New Delhi to first say hold peace talks, and then say, "no, no, you cannot hold peace talks on Indian soil", Ratnatunga said.

Commentators say they are equally intrigued by the LTTE suggestion and by India's response. They say Balasingham had succeeded in highlighting Delhi's dilemma. It refuses to play a positive role but wants the Norwegians to keep it informed of every move. Norwegians briefed Indian High Commissioner in Colombo Gopala Krishna Gandhi on January 11 about the progress of the talks they held in London and Colombo.

Equally fascinating was LTTE's attitude towards India. When Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe visited India, LTTE's reaction was one of irritation and skepticism. Colombo cuddling up with New Delhi has always been viewed by the LTTE leadership with undisguised suspicion. In this context, Balasingham's suggestion itself is intriguing.

Sri Lanka on January 10 dismissed suggestions that a south Indian city could be the venue for negotiations with the LTTE as "premature" speculation. "This speculation is premature. We have not reached such a productive or meaningful stage in the peace process," Cabinet spokesman and Enterprise Development Minister G.L. Peiris said. Peiris, along with another Minister, Milinda Moragoda, has been deputed to handle the peace process.

The Government of India could not be expected to respond to media speculation which had spoken of the LTTE desiring that a south Indian city like Chennai, Bangalore or Thiruvananthapuram could be the venue for proposed direct talks with the Sri Lankan Government, he said.

The Tamil Nadu Government itself urged the Centre not to concede the LTTE's plea for using either Chennai or any other part of the State as a venue for its peace negotiations with the Sri Lankan Government. Stoutly opposing any move to give space for the outlawed LTTE to reestablish its base in Tamil Nadu, the Chief Minister, O. Paneerselvam, categorically asserted:

"The LTTE is a banned terrorist organisation. And, there is no scope for allowing them here." Nirupama Subramanian, the "Hindu" correspondent in Colombo, in a piece published on January 9, 2002, quoting observers and analysts in Colombo said: "The request by the LTTE for its London representative, Anton Balasingham, to be re-located to Che-nnai and for peace talks to take place in a south Indian city, is a "transparent ploy" to regain legitimacy in India but once again raised "awkward" questions for New Delhi on the role it wants to play in the Sri Lankan peace process.

The report also quoted Mr. L. Ketheeswaran of the private Centre for Policy Alternatives (CPA), saying "The reasons that the LTTE has given are mainly logistical and medical from Mr. Balasingham's point of view, but it also seems to be exploring ways for a re-turn to legitimacy in India." Although this was the overall feeling in Sri Lanka, too, the obvious reluctance by India to agree to this to some extent dashed Prime Minister Wickremasinghe's hopes of having India more closely involved. Sri Lankan observers saw this as a move to get India to waive its ban on the LTTE and ignore the fact that its leaders are wanted for execution under law for the assassination of Prime Minster Rajiv Gandhi, while at the same time, making it easier for the Sri Lankan Government to lift the ban on the LTTE. It is now reported that both the LTTE and the Sri Lankan authorities are exploring the possibilities of Kathmandu, in Nepal, being the venue for preliminary discussions, for talks that are not likely to begin till early April.

Chandrika's assurance

Prime Minister Wickremasinghe received a much needed fillip for his current efforts at peace when President Kumaratunga speaking at the Kathmandu sessions of the SAARC summit, declared her party would give every assistance to the Prime Minister in genuine efforts to bring the peace process to a success.

The President's statement while giving strength to the Prime Minister, especially her comments about the possibility of success in the experiment in "co-habitation" in government between

the PA and UNF, also sought to protect her own flank within the PA. There is a strong move among at least 20 of the 77 elected members of the PA to cross over to the Government to support its peace initiative, by forming a "National Government." Overtures are being made to this group by a section of the UNP; led by former PA minister S. B. Dissanayake, keen to impeach the President, for which a two-thirds majority is required.

With his main objective being the success of the peace initiative that has already brought much hope and promising response from the LTTE, Prime Minister Wickremasinghe is certainly in no need just now for any moves to impeach the President, and walk into a political quagmire. He has to use all his skills of leadership to fend of the demand that is emerging within sections of the UNP to attack the President until she is removed from the political scene. The Prime Minister would much rather tread softly on this issue rather than face a political storm both within his own party and in the country.

Exit Gamini Atukorale

Through unexpected tragedy, January 1, 2002 saw the strengthening of the Prime Minister's position within the UNP, and consequently the UNF. It was the sudden death of the Assistant Leader of the UNP, Mr. Gamini Atukorale, Minister of Highways & Transport, and leader of the UNP's trade union, the currently powerful Jathika Sevaka Sangamaya (JSS). The late Gamini Atukorale (51) was among those who were involved in a serious move to oust Ranil Wickremasinghe from the leadership of the UNP, when it had suffered ten electoral defeats. After the recent victory, he aligned himself with the group that was seeking to oust President Kumaratunga, through impeachment.

The sudden demise of Gamini Atukorale has made Ranil Wickremasinghe's position in the UNP much safer, with its deputy leader Karu Jayasuriya not known to be much of a political strategist. The immediate absence of Gamini Atukorale, whose portfolios have been added to strong Ranil supporter, Defence Minister, Gamini Marapona, has somewhat, weakened the group that is demanding that the Government act against President Kumaratunga during its first 100 days in office.

Local Government polls

The President prevented attempts by the UNF to hold local government polls in early March, by her not giving consent to a Bill to amend the Local Government Elections, in time to submit it to the Supreme Court for assent. This would compel the Government to hold polls to over 1,500 local bodies by mid March.

The UNP's strategy is to hold these polls as soon as possible to make full use of the voter swing that brought it to power on December 5, and consolidate its position in the local authorities, before its popularity drops due to high prices and political revenge. The delay of the local polls has been a setback to the UNF's strategy of presenting its Budget, due in before the end of March, after it had won the local polls. It is now likely that the Government will have to obtain a Vote on Account to manage till the local polls are over, after which the Government will present its budget, that is likely to have harsh fiscal and economic measures.

The PA meanwhile is readying itself for the local polls, but is faced with considerable difficulties due to the large number of its activists, specially PA members, including chairmen of local bodies, being held in remand or police custody, for alleged acts of pre-election and post election violence. There is also the general atmosphere of fear to contest the UNF, due to the spree of post-election violence that was permitted unchecked for nearly one month after the December 5 elections. A large number of PA supporters, or those even suspected of supporting the PA, are being victimized in Government departments, corporations and authorities, with the UNP's trade union arm, the JSS having its own way in the matter of promotions and appointments of its members, with interdiction and harassment of perceived rivals.

It took nearly one month after the December 5, election for the Government to appoint two Parliamentary Committees, including members both from the Government and Opposition, to examine these instances of post-election violence. It recalls the events after the UNP's sweeping victory in 1977, when Prime Minister J. R. Jayewardene, gave the Police "one month's leave", in the wake of widespread post-election violence, then particularly directed against Tamils too.

The President and some PA leaders have held talks with the JVP on means of countering post-elections violence, and there are some chances of the PA and JVP coming to an understanding on contesting the local elections. However, there are major differences of opinion on this within both the PA and JVP. Such an understanding with the JVP will be particularly difficult as the JVP is strongly opposed to the current peace moves of the Government. It is the most vocal opponent of the peace process, insisting that the LTTE give up the demand for a separate state before any talks begin, and wanting the ban on it lifted only after talks progress. It recently placed its views on this issue and post-election violence before Western diplomats.

The secret's out

Whether it was genuine police bungling or an act of "bungling" directed by those in the UNF, a long held secret of the Sri Lanka Army came to light when the police raided an Army Safe House, at Athurugiriya, near Colombo late December. They found several army personnel, an LTTE deserter among them, with many sophisticated weapons, communications & surveillance equipment. Appeals by the Army that this was a special unit of the Army, used for Deep Penetration Operations, were of no use, as the Police said they were investigating an alleged plot to assassinate the new Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe.

Thus came to light the existence of the Deep Penetration Unit of the Sri Lanka Army, that was responsible for taking out some leading cadres of the LTTE in the past one year, within areas held by the LTTE. The Army on those occasions stoutly denied having any such unit, and blamed the killings on the LTTE's own internecine battles, despite LTTE blaming these attacks on the Army.

The Army and Police blame each other, but the fact that UNF politicians were at the ready to leak the story to the Media, and refusal of the Police to check with higher ranks in the Army, and even ignore some of their appeals, indicates this could be no simple case of police bungling. The Army claims that the raid exposed a well kept secret that has also led to demoralizing of its ranks, especially as those arrested have not been released even ten days later, and are still being questioned. The smell of politics lingers heavy over the entire exercise.

The Developing Peace Process

Dr Jehan Perera

The peace process appears to be proceeding faster than most people could reasonably have expected. Besides the announcement and observance of unilateral ceasefires by both sides, Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe's letter to his Norwegian counterpart requesting a resumption of Norwegian facilitation of the Sri Lankan peace process, has been reciprocated by LTTE leader Velupillai Prabakaran.

A Norwegian delegation headed by Bondevik met in London with top official advisor to the LTTE, Anton Balasingham. Norway's Foreign Ministry called the talks "constructive" but gave no details. The delegation also visited Colombo and had talks with all parties concerned, including the President, Prime Minister, Tamil National Alliance and the SLMC, following which it expressed cautious optimism.

Unilateral moves

After the election of the new government there has been rapid progress towards a cessation of hostilities between the government and LTTE. The LTTE's announcement of a month long unilateral ceasefire beginning on December 24 was swiftly followed by a government decision to reciprocate with a similar ceasefire of its own. In addition the government decided to action to relax the economic embargo on LTTE controlled areas.

So far the positive actions of the two parties have been unilateral ones. There are two ways to look at unilateral actions. Those who have faith in the peace process, and see no alternative to it, may see in them confidence-building initiatives. On the other hand, those who have little faith in the peace process may see these unilateral actions as being in the nature of manoeuvers to embarrass and trap the other side.

By declaring its ceasefire, the LTTE may have put the new government on the defensive a bare week after it was sworn in, and before it could probe its relationship with the armed forces and their commander-in-chief President Kumaratunga. But the new government under Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe has taken the challenge in its stride.

Ceasefires have been controversial issues in Sri Lanka. Past experience is that they have ended in disasters, with the LTTE striking first with heavy losses to the Sri Lankan armed forces. Obtaining agreement of the armed forces would be an important aspect of declaring a ceasefire. However, in making its response to the LTTE without any delay, the new government has shown confidence in implementing its notion of the peace process. In particular, Prime Minister Wickremesinghe has taken a huge responsibility on his shoulders.

While in India, the Prime Minister justified his latest decision to end the economic embargo on the LTTE-controlled areas by reference to his party's pledge in its election manifesto. He is quoted as having said, "We are taking care of the humanitarian and development concerns on our own. There is nothing to negotiate on that. When the talks begin, they will have to be on substantive issues." By saying this, the Prime Minister seems to have said that humanitarian and developmental assistance to the people in those parts is not a subject for bargaining at peace talks, but is part of his government's commitment to the people. Therefore, further unilateral action on the part of the government can be expected where humanitarian and developmental issues are concerned. There will not be a public debate and discussion on these issues as well.

Consensus in society

Today, there is virtually a consensus in society that the war cannot be won on both sides of the divide. Therefore an autocratic decision-making process within the government that advances the peace process is unlikely to be opposed by the people at this time. It is also likely to continue in the short to medium term.

The Prime Minister has also said that peace talks with the LTTE would concern substantive issues. During the recent election campaign, the UNF leadership was markedly reluctant to spell out a political framework that could lead to a satisfaction of Tamil aspirations, in part perhaps because of the apprehension that it would be distorted by the state media and other political opponents. Perhaps another part of the reason was the belief that the framework needs to be worked out stage by stage in the negotiation process itself.

Where questions of political power and constitutional reform are concerned, there is likely to be a high degree of contestation regarding the way forward to a mutually acceptable solution. There will undoubtedly be differences between the government, opposition and LTTE. These differences pertaining to issues of governance will be reflected among the people at large. A more democratic and consultative type of decision making will be required at this stage. Civil society organisations need to be preparing the people for the restructuring of the polity in the longer term.

The international community can also play an important and effective role. The past experience with the LTTE has been one of disengagement once discussions reach substantive issues. This is on account of the wide gap between LTTE demands and what the Sri Lankan government has been prepared to offer. The success of the peace talks on the substantive issues of political restructuring would depend largely on international pressure that would keep the government and LTTE at the negotiations table, and compel them towards compromise.

No peace process, or any human process for that matter, is clean and without reversals. Already the government's rapprochement with the LTTE shows signs of being pushed at the edges. The refusal by the security forces permit armed and uniform-clad LTTE cadre with cyanide capsules around their necks from entering government-controlled areas is a pointer of prob-

lems to come. Another is the demand by Tamil political parties and most recently by a Jaffna University students association to disarm Tamil para-military groups that have been fighting alongside government troops and providing them with information.

A more controversial action of the government has been its decision to remove military checkpoints and barriers in virtually all parts of Colombo, and in the north-east. While this has made traffic much easier to the relief of civilians and commercial interests, some fear that the action has paved the way for LTTE infiltration and possible future attacks in the event of a breakdown of the present ceasefire. Particularly vulnerable is the position of former government leaders who are now deprived of the bulk of their armed guards. Like all citizens they have their right to personal security, and even more so as those who served the state. So far there is no indication that the LTTE has made any promise not to assassinate its enemies, exploiting the conditions of ceasefire and the newly opened roads of the country. Perhaps in recognition of this grim reality, some members of the former government have been permitted to stay on in their high security official residences after they refused to leave them.

Non-confrontational approach

The new government's strategy is a complete shift from that of the previous government's, which was to confront the LTTE at every level. So far the government led by Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe has been non-confrontational in its approach to its opponents, whether they be those in the former government or LTTE. Instead the Prime Minister and his closest colleagues appear to be completely focused on taking the country to a different place, far removed from the present reality of an economy and society devastated by 18 years of warfare. The vision spelled out in India by the Prime Minister of a land bridge that would link Sri Lanka to India exemplifies the new approach. It seeks to transcend the grimness of the present reality with the opportunities of the future.

The government's strategy appears to be based on an assessment of the former government's failure to succeed through confrontation. After the collapse of the peace talks with the LTTE at the very beginning of its term of office in April 1995, the former government declared a full-scale war for peace. The two-pronged military and political strategy aimed to weaken and sideline the LTTE. But both types of confrontation failed.

Two lessons

It seems that the new government under Prime Minister Wickremesinghe has absorbed two important lessons from the former government's failure. The first is that head-on confrontation will not bring a solution to the ethnic conflict. Accordingly, political and structural reforms might have to be de facto rather than de jure, to be acquiesced in by the general population with whom as little information as possible is shared. The alternative of explaining everything in detail to the people in order to get them to vote in favour of the settlement is likely to get into too much controversy. There is deep-rooted resistance in the Sinhalese community to fundamental constitutional reform that would lead to powersharing across the ethnic and regional lines.

Further, the LTTE too thrives on confrontation, by its astuteness in ensuring that the costs of any confrontational situation are piled onto the Tamil civilian population, creating in them an alienation towards the government which is made to appear the source of the problem.

The second lesson evidently learnt by the new government is that all outstanding problems cannot be resolved in one go, but require a stage by stage approach. The two-pronged approach of the former government aimed at knock-out victories, such as by the Jaffna victory and the devolution package. But even when the task was accomplished, as in the retaking and successful holding of Jaffna, the resilience of the LTTE ensured that the victory was incomplete. It is likely that even if the devolution package had been passed with the bipartisan support of the opposition, its implementation would have been impossible due to resistance by the LTTE.

Having witnessed, and contributed to, the failure of the former government's confrontational strategy, the new government appears to have opted for a non-confrontational strategy for the time being at least. However, no strategy that aims to end the bitterly contested and costly 18-year war can be problem or risk-free. Already the Marxist nationalist JVP has embarked upon a massive poster campaign denouncing the present ceasefire as a spurious one and calling upon the people to oppose any de-banning of the LTTE. On the other side of the divide, LTTE proxies are making their own demands on the government.

The fragility of today's peace in the context of strong opposing forces highlights the high-risk nature of the gamble being taken by the government for peace. After 18 years of war the government and LTTE have little reason to trust each other.

Confidence building

In a situation of mistrust, confidence-building measures are undoubtedly important. The sending in of humanitarian supplies without any restriction would be one example. Release of prisoners of war would be another. It is however important that these initial measures must not undermine security of one side or the other. It is only when the security of the conflicting parties is ensured that become free to truly trust, take risks and be generous in the great cause of peace with justice.

In removing virtually all barriers to physical movement of the LTTE at this time, even before peace has been consolidated by publicly acknowledged guarantees, the new government has taken a big risk. Any interaction with those with whom trust has broken down involves risks that need to be minimised. The concerns of those who are likely to be the first victims of a breakdown of the ceasefire also need to be heeded.

There have to be guarantees before anyone's or any society's security is compromised. The present ceasefire, as stated by both sides, is temporary only, for one month though it is likely to be extended. At this time, perhaps only the new Prime Minister and his closest colleagues would be knowing whether this guarantee has in fact been obtained from the LTTE or some other party. The political courage, vision and analysis of past failures of confrontation that underlies the new government's gamble for peace needs to be appreciated.

The government's decision to lift most of the economic embargo on the LTTE-controlled areas and the removal of most security barriers in Colombo and elsewhere appear to commit the government to an irrevocable peace process, the breakdown of which would

cost it dearly.

Perhaps the government is going as far as it is on the reasoning that the country cannot afford to lose more years of economic development. Instead of growing by 7-10 percent, which it is potentially capable of doing, the economy last year shrank by almost 1 percent. With its intellectual support base strongest among the business class, the new government's focus will tend to be the economy, above all other considerations.

Two key features

It appears that two key features of the government's strategy to satisfy the LTTE and bring it to the path of peace would be to remove the ban placed on it, and to set up an interim council for the North-East province.

The next major phase of the peace process will be the commencement of direct talks between the two sides. The LTTE has made the removal of the governments ban on it a prerequisite for such peace talks to commence. From the LTTE's perspective, there are at least two reasons for it would seek to have the ban removed. By removing the ban on the LTTE the government will be conceding that the LTTE is not a mere terrorist organisation, but is a military and political formation that embodies Tamil aspirations that have a long history. This would be likely to satisfy the LTTE leadership's sense of nationalism and destiny. It will also gain the LTTE sufficient legitimacy to contest the increasing number of bans being slapped on them internationally.

In 2001 alone the LTTE fell foul of bans placed on it in the UK, Canada and Australia, which added to the bans already placed on it by India and the US. The gradual expansion of these international bans and the tightening of their implementation could have serious implications on LTTE fund-raising activities in different parts of the world. Second, when its negotiators sit with those of the government, they would want to be doing so as parties that enjoy parity of status at the negotiating table.

With the present ceasefire and removal of security barriers in Colombo and elsewhere, the government has effectively taken the position that terrorist violence against either politicians or civilian targets is not going to take place. This is the larger risk because the possible loss of life in case of any violation of this trust is irreversible. On the other hand, the removal of the LTTE ban can always be reversed should the LTTE breach the trust that has been placed on it.

This ban was placed on the LTTE immediately after it bombed the sacred Dalada Maligawa in January 1998. Without trying to bargain with the LTTE regarding lifting the ban, it is likely that the government will once again make a unilateral gesture in lifting the ban. Of course, this is likely to generate a great deal of opposition from sections of Sinhalese nationalist opinion. Anticipating a governmental move to lift the ban on the LTTE, the Marxist nationalist JVP (which was once banned itself as a terrorist organisation) has been plastering the streets of Sri Lanka with posters warning the people against such a measure. There is likely to be a build-up of opposition to the government's actions in the days and weeks ahead.

Renouncing terrorism

In this regard, the LTTE could make the government's position more sus-

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tainable by making a public declaration of its own that it will renounce what the world has called terrorism, even if it does not agree with that definition of the term. Such a declaration by the LTTE could take the peace process to a new level, in which the politics of trust and generosity prevail, rather than those of fear and selfishness. This will help the government to continue with the peace process in the present positive spirit and manner. Besides, a renunciation of non-battlefield violence, can help the LTTE gain more international credibility than it currently enjoys.

Most foreign countries that have banned the LTTE have done so for reasons of their own, possibly fearing an LTTE connection with other international terrorist organisations. The two key examples would be India in 1992 and the US in 1996, both of which banned the LTTE even before the Sri Lankan government had imposed its own ban. Therefore, it is unlikely that the government should suffer any international reversal as a result of lifting its own ban on the LTTE. On the contrary, the international community is likely to be supportive of a Sri Lankan decision to lift the ban on the LTTE to pave the way for peace talks. They would prefer that terrorism ends through political means than through military means.

A few days after the US declared its war against terrorism on September 11, 2001, the US embassy in Sri Lanka made a statement that a negotiated settlement was the way in which to end the country's conflict. If the United States could take this stand, then it is clear that most of the world will also be supportive of the Sri Lankan government's commitment to the cause of peace. In India this week, British Prime Minister Tony Blair has made clear his belief that the Kashmir dispute and its associated terrorist problem should be settled politically and not militarily. It is most unlikely that the international community will use the lifting of the Sri Lankan government's ban on the LTTE to disadvantage the government in any way.

Indian Role

The latest LTTE proposal that India should play host to forthcoming peace talks with the Sri Lankan Government comes close to being yet another one of its pre-requisites for creating conducive conditions for peace talks. The LTTE has made its case in terms of a humanitarian issue, being that of its chief negotiator Dr Anton Balasingham's poor health condition and requirement of the best hospital attention. It is only the hospital facilities available in India that could keep Dr Balasingham alive and well during the protracted negotiation process that would require him to keep in direct contact with the LTTE leadership in the Vanni.

The LTTE previously used the vocabulary of pre-requisites for negotiations to foil the former Government's efforts to sit with it at the negotiating table from a position of strength. The LTTE's present unexpected proposal that India should play willing or unwilling host brings a key LTTE characteristic into focus. It reveals an LTTE frame of mind that is highly innovative and full of surprises. Time and again the LTTE has caught its opponents by surprise, catching them in ambushes at the most unexpected time, and has stood it in good stead militarily. But military combat in which the unilateral destruction of the opponent is sought is very different from political negotiations in which the willing participation of the other is necessary. Putting the opponent on the spot, or publicly embarrassing them into conforming to one's own agenda, is not the way forward, but is only likely to evoke further mistrust and hostility.

Tamil Nadu objection

In order to strengthen its proposal that India should play host to the peace talks, the LTTE has accused the Indian Government of having armed and trained the Tamil militant organizations in the past, thereby incurring an obligation to put itself out for them in the present. But India is unlikely to oblige for two sets of reasons. First is that mainstream political opinion in Tamil Nadu has been opposed to an LTTE re-entry into the State. The underground activities of the LTTE, the assassination of former Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi in the State and the war with the Indian Peace Keeping Force in Sri Lanka have lost the LTTE much of the sympathy they once enjoyed in Tamil Nadu. It is also likely that the political leadership of Tamil Nadu is not keen to host a rival claimant for the leadership of the world Tamil movement. The Indian Government is likely to be deferential to Tamil Nadu's political leadership when it decides on the LTTE's proposal. India was the first country to ban the LTTE in 1992, a year after the assassination of its former Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi on his comeback trail in Tamil Nadu.

India has a second reason to view the LTTE in an unfavorable light, which is the reverse of what the LTTE argues. The organization that India once nurtured and provided sanctuary to turned on it with fury in 1987 after the signing of the Indo-Lanka peace accord, and battled the Indian army for two years to a standstill. Individuals may practise the politics of forgiveness as Pope John Paul exhorted in his New Year message on peace. But Governments and governmental institutions, which are worldly creations, are less forgiving. By making its request of the Indian Government, the LTTE may have demonstrated to its support base that it is prepared to let bygones be bygones and not nurture a grudge for too long. But from India's perspective the LTTE has done little as yet to merit it being hosted as a potential peacemaker. If India does accept the LTTE's proposal it will come under pressure to take the LTTE off its list of banned terrorist organizations. This would pave the way for a renewal of the LTTE's legitimacy in the international community, which has recently being taking steps to ban the LTTE. Most importantly, by involving India at a very early stage in the peace process, the LTTE may be seeking to protect its leader who is on the Indian list of wanted men and has an Indian extradition warrant to reckon with in a post-conflict scenario.

Indian interests

While the LTTE's request makes sense from its own perspective it neglects some of the requirements of diplomacy and might even be counterproductive in terms of restoring its relationship with India. There is a need to do a great deal of spadework before a great diplomatic prize is won. Audacity in international politics is generally not appreciated. No one, and certainly not a Government of India's stature, would wish to be put publicly on the spot and be coerced either materially or morally to do what it would rather not do. It appears that the LTTE's initial suggestion of India as a suitable venue for peace talks was not canvassed first with the Indian Government.

Rather it appears to have been first floated through the media.

This accounts for the Indian position that since no formal request had been made to them, there was no need to respond with a formal Government statement. If a request is made to India it might be more reasonable that hospital facilities alone be asked for Dr Balasingham, which would be a purely humanitarian request, rather than to ask India to play host to the peace talks themselves.

There are, however, some important reasons why India would wish to play a bigger role in the Sri Lankan peace process, with or without the LTTE's invitation to them to play host. The first would be to reaffirm India's diplomatic dominance over the South Asian region. The active diplomatic role currently being played by Norway in the Sri Lankan peace process could herald an increased western role in intervening in conflict resolution processes in South Asia as a whole. In fact due to heightened India-Pakistan tensions over the Kashmir issue, and the tragic inability of the two South Asian giants to resolve their problems by themselves, the United States is playing a conflict resolution role between those two countries. It would be in India's longer-term interests in obtaining some positive role in the Sri Lankan peace process.

A Norwegian-led success in Sri Lanka would assuredly raise an interest in similar western third party initiatives to resolve India's internal and external conflicts, which show little signs of abating. On the other hand, if India could claim joint ownership to a successful peace process in Sri Lanka, its credibility for conflict resolution would be enhanced within its own polity. However, the very costly and futile Indian effort to intervene directly in Sri Lanka's ethnic conflict from the period 1985 to 1989 will probably deter any further such initiatives. It is likely that a great deal more of diplomatic and tripartite relationship building will be necessary before India gets itself involved in a direct manner again. Therefore, in the present phase of the Sri Lankan peace process, it is likely that Norway will play the lead third party role, as it did with much sensitivity in the Israel-Palestine conflict also. This would include obtaining a stable ceasefire, building in humanitarian and human rights protections into the ceasefire agreement, and getting an interim council underway.

There is no doubt that what happens in Sri Lanka will be closely studied in India by those who wish to forge a new polity in India. So far India has attempted to resolve all its own internal disputes within the framework of its own constitution, which offers its states a form of semi-federal autonomy. If Sri Lanka were to go further than this to resolve its own ethnic conflict, India will have reason to be concerned. The peace settlement in Sri Lanka could become proposed as a model for India itself, or at least for some of its conflicts. For these reasons a future Indian role in the Sri Lankan peace process can be anticipated, even if it is not forthcoming at present. ●

To Vanni with a Video Camera

Piramanalankulam, January 17, 2002 - The military officer examining the bag looked bewildered when 28-year-old Sivalingam Paramsothy pulled out a brand new Japanese video camera. He took it to his superior who had a good look at it and nodded permission to take it into LTTE-held Vanni.

"It's not in the banned or restricted list," the superior officer, a captain in the Sri Lanka Army (SLA), said. That was a banned item for nearly 12 years, when a stringent economic embargo was strictly enforced.

Paramsothy was taking it with him to video his aged mother Pushpavathy, 87, who was living at Puthukudiyiruppu, the virtual capital of Pirabakaran's domain, where she moved in with her daughter and her family in 1995 when the army wrested control of the Jaffna peninsula.

"This is my third try to go to Vanni," Paramsothy said. His earlier attempts failed because he could not obtain the pass.

At Piramanalankulam, army's frontier checkpoint, soldiers look for six banned items -firearms, explosives, binoculars, barbed wire, remote control devices and pen torch (AAA) batteries and for cement, petrol, diesel and iron rods which are restricted.

A group of 41 journalists, local and foreign, traveled in a convoy of cars led by an ICRC pilot vehicle. They were the first group of journalists to enter Vanni. Journalists were banned since 1990, when the third Eelam war erupted. It comprised 46 men and women from the print and electronic media, including TV crews from Rupavahini, ITN. MTV, BBC. And Reuters.

"When our car crossed the front line into Vanni, we left behind the last government controlled checkpoint, patrolled by heavily armed, uniformed soldiers," says BBC's Anna Horsburgh Porter. "On the other side we were met by their enemy, Tamil Tigers, conspicuously dressed in casual clothes and unarmed."

1994 and Now

They were received by Sudhakaran (Sudha Master), deputy leader of LTTE political wing and Shankar, Thamil Selvam's secretary, and conducted to Madhu Church where lunch was served. At 4.30p.m., under heavy escort, they were taken to Thunukkai, a hamlet two miles south of Mallawi, a 45- kilometer journey.

"The journey was slow and tedious," says Thinakaran staffer S. Ganeshan who was in the group. "The roads are no more than dirt tracks full of craters, which make any journey torturous," he said. The journey took six hours. They reached their destination by around 10.30 in the night.

The journalists were put up in three LTTE camps and served delicious chicken buriyani. They were given plastic mats, pillows and bed-sheets, all new, and requested to sleep on the ground.

Next morning, Wednesday, they were taken to another camp for a press briefing held by LTTE political wing chief S.P. Thamil Selvam.

Ganeshan, who had covered the 1994 peace talks in Jaffna, says: "Thamil Selvam sounded positive about a solution. He displayed a lot of confidence in Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe." That confidence was absent in 1994.

In 1994 Balasingham headed the LTTE delegation. Thamil Selvam was his assistant. At the end of the first round, Balasingham took Ganeshan aside and told him in Tamil: Uthu ondum sari varathu, Ganeshan. Uvankal serious illai (This will not yield results Ganeshan. They are not serious about it.)

On Wednesday Sutha Master and Sankar, who Ganeshan had first met in 1994 confided that they believed that the government is serious and they had confidence in Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe.

They also told him that LTTE had given its consent to open Kandy road for traffic between Vavuniya and Jaffna. The long stretch from Omanthai to Mukamalai is under LTTE control.

Three Matters

Thamil Selvam's briefing revolved around three matters: easing of the economic embargo, lifting of the ban on the LTTE and Balasingham's request to hold the talks in Chennai. Thamil Selvam welcomed the easing of the economic blockade and expressed LTTE's desire for total lifting. Removal of the ban is essential to talk as equals and Tamils desire India to play a bigger role in working out a peaceful solution and accommodating Balasingham in Chennai would help.

On LTTE's disquiet about the easing of the economic blockade, Economic Reforms Minister Milinda Moragoda's response was, "We are taking this on a step by step basis, and trying to consolidate each step." He was present at Piramanalankulam, a small, heavily-guarded checkpoint on a dusty dirt road, to monitor the transport of goods, food and medicine and to ensure the comforts of the travellers. Three other ministers, Interior Minister John Amaratunga who is in charge of the police, Minister for Rehabilitation and Reconstruction and Refugee Affairs, Dr. Jayalath Jayawardena, and Minister for Vanni regional rehabilitation, Noordeen Mashoor, were also with Morogoda. So were the military top brass including Army Commander General Lionel Balagalle.

Thirty lorries rolled into the rebel region. They were loaded with bicycles, car tyres, cooking pots, electric cables and other goods, all banned earlier, along with food, chemical manure including urea, medicine and other essential necessities. Urea was earlier banned claiming that it could be used to manufacture explosives.

Dr. Jayawardene was elated. "This will herald an era of peace," he declared.

But a lot of logistical problems remain. Thirty lorries a day allowed by the SLA to cross the line for four days a week would not be sufficient to meet the massive demand of the Vanni residents.

"Transport of essential goods will be my priority," K. Ganesh, GA Vavuniya says. Getting 30 lorries every day is in itself a heavy task. Currently, Multi Purpose Cooperative Societies (MPCS) have to collect the goods at Piramanalankulam and transport them to Vanni. Ganesh admits MPCS lack financial and logistical capacity to buy and distribute so much of goods.

The government will have to then introduce private traders and are proposing to give first preference to people living in the rebel area. No decision has been taken so far.

Travellers

On their return journey journalists took some time to look around. There is no public transport. People said only a few private buses plied between Piramanalankulam and Malawi and charged Rs; 150 for the journey. There were a few private cars and they charged Rs.1000 per person. They pack eight passengers.

Bicycles are their common mode of travel. Journalists stopped at an MPCS store that sells bicycles. They were that they had sold each bicycle for Rs. 16,000. Now it had dropped to Rs. 7,000.

"We got five and were snatched up," K. Shanmugam, the manager said. "There is a great demand. We hope to get down more."

Reverend Anthony Thevanayagam, who is in charge of the historic Madhu church, said:

"The prices of a large number of essential items have fallen by 50 to 75 percent."

There are no shops apart from roadside shacks, and no electricity. All good buildings were destroyed when troops advanced upto Thunukkai under Operation Jaya Sukuru. They were pushed back by the Tigers in December 1999.

Journalists noticed no military activity in Vanni in the two days they were there. They were told that the girls who had their plaits crossed at the back of their head, and wore a tight belt around their waists, were Tigers fighters. They 'caught' two young boys who said they were 18 but looked much younger. They pulled out, proudly, the glass cyanide capsules hanging around their necks, and proclaimed they would commit suicide if captured. Every few miles there are signs on trees warning of land mines in the fields and jungle.

On their return to the check-point, they said, they saw a long queue of people- men, women and children - on the Tiger side waiting to cross over to the government side.

Some of them said they had spent 24 hours travelling to reach the front line.

Restrictions barring people from travelling to and from government controlled areas were also eased on January 15.

Civilians coming from the Vanni do not need to produce documents signed by government and village officials to prove their bona fide. They need to only bring their national identity cards now. They would be given a permit to stay two weeks in Vavuniya. Earlier they got ten days.

"We are going to Vavuniya to call our family living in Canada. We are happy because we can come more often now and there are no problems," said V Maheswari, a civilian living in Vanni.

Long, slippery road

Six hundred civilians would be permitted to cross each day from Monday to Friday from Vanni to Vavuniya. Earlier, only seven hundred were allowed

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Another Attempt At Peace Making

Dr. S. Narapalasingam

After four failed attempts in settling the protracted ethnic conflict since it escalated into a full-scale civil war since July 1983 with enormous losses to both sides and to the country at large, another attempt has been made by the UNP-led new United National Front government to settle the dispute peacefully. In response to the request of both the government and the LTTE, Norway has agreed to remain the facilitator of the revived peace process. After preliminary talks with leaders of both sides, the Norwegian team headed by their Deputy Foreign Minister Vidar Helgesen said it was "cautiously optimistic" about the peace process. The reasons for the cautiousness were not disclosed and indeed as a facilitator of the peace process, no one can expect the team to sound pessimistic about the chances of reaching a negotiated settlement of the conflict.

In a statement issued on January 12 through the Norwegian embassy in Colombo after two days of talks with the Government leaders and other party leaders in Sri Lanka, Vidar Helgesen said there was an "increased level of confidence between the parties" involved in the Sri Lankan conflict. Since the main focus has initially been on lifting the economic embargo and other restrictions, which inflicted enormous suffering on the civilians living in the LTTE-controlled areas and the formalisation of the ceasefire observed unilaterally by both sides since last Christmas so as to ensure its continuity over a longer term, the felt confidence might be in respect of the process of decreasing the hostilities and improving living conditions not only in the North-East but also in the rest of the island. Present government has made it known very clearly that it is focusing now solely on "confidence-building measures to lay a foundation for

peace talks at a future date." This was indicated earlier to be March but now May this year is said to be the likely time. Apparently, the Norwegian team too is concentrating on the initial moves such as converting the ceasefire into a mutually agreed permanent arrangement rather than arranging substantive talks between the Government and the LTTE. The latter too is not ready for negotiations on the core issues that are vital for a final political settlement. So it seems that the latest peace process at least in principle is consistent with the immediate objectives of both the Government and the LTTE.

Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe in his address to the UNP's 47th convention on January 12 said: "The road we travel will not be short, it is a long road. It is a road on which you cannot travel fast. It is a slow road. It is not an easy road. It is a difficult road. The road to peace is slippery, rugged and full of potholes. We will travel on it with eyes open to ensure that we deliver peace without dividing the country". He also affirmed that his government's peace process would safeguard the territorial integrity of Sri Lanka while recognising the rights and aspirations of all its citizens. His remark - Sri Lanka would not have faced the current crisis if all parties had accepted the 1987 Indo-Lanka Peace Accord does not mean that the UNF government will not go beyond the 13th Amendment. Whatever this may mean, the fact is that the LTTE rejected the Accord in 1987 despite the inducements and considerable pressure exerted by India.

India's present distant stand with regard to the ethnic conflict in Sri Lanka, has been criticised by some Tamils who are either unable or unwilling to be realistic in their grasp of existing situations. India like many other countries is interested in a peaceful settlement of the conflict without endangering the unity, territorial integrity and sovereignty of Sri Lanka.

The purpose of Ranil Wickremesinghe's three-day official visit to New Delhi (December 22-24), a fortnight after being elected as the Prime Minister was to acquaint the Indian leaders with the initiatives of his government to settle the protracted conflict in Sri Lanka and to ascertain India's present stand on the issue as well as on Norway's facilitation role. Sri Lanka's Prime Minister wanted to give India a big role in the peace process. Apparently, India did not want either a direct or indirect role in the peace process and preferred Norway's involvement as a

(Continued from page 21)

to come through on Tuesdays and Fridays. Similarly, six hundred would be allowed into Vanni during weekdays. The new regulations, thus, permit 3,000 persons to cross either way while 1400 were allowed in the past. There is a move to open another entry point as demand for transport of goods and travel rise.

The Draconian laws civilians had to face in obtaining clearance from the SLA for travell from Vavunya to other parts of the country too have been eased.

Ganeshan said the overriding feeling residents in Vanni is one of isolation, of being somewhere so remote that they are entirely cut off from the rest of humanity. Dharmaraj, a teacher serving at Adamban Maha Vidyalaya put this predicament pithily: I am a teacher employed by the Government of Sri Lanka and preparing the students doe the examinations conducted by its Examination Department but told: You are not one of us. You are a suspect"

Prime Minister Wickremesinghe realises that substantial confidence building effort has to be put in before tackling "substantive issues" to end the conflict.

"The road we travel will not be short, it is a long road. It is a road on which you cannot travel fast. It is a slow road. It is a difficult road. It is not an easy road. The road to peace is slippery, rugged and full of potholes. We will travel on it with eyes open to ensure that we deliver peace without dividing the country, Wickremasinghe told members of the United National Party at it 47th convention at the Colombo Town Hall, on January 5. ●

facilitator.

Despite this known position of India and the various antagonistic acts carried out by the LTTE against the mighty nation that infuriated not only the northerners but also the southerners including the Tamils in Tamil Nadu, LTTE's solicitation for Chennai or Bangalore with strong preference for the former as the venue ("negotiating table" according to LTTE's political wing leader) for peace talks with the Sri Lankan government has been scorned by many prominent leaders and political parties in India. Several leading Indian newspapers also condemned angrily the proposal in their editorials as audacious with an ulterior motive aimed at stalling the peace process. Some considered the move as an indirect means to regain the legitimacy lost after the assassination of Rajiv Gandhi.

The ruling AIADMK party is determined to see that Chennai does not become a "sanctuary" for the LTTE leadership. AIADMK's stand is supported by the mainstream parties including the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) the dominant partner in the coalition government at the centre. BJP president Jana Krishnamurthy also said the LTTE should not be allowed to hold peace talks with the Sri Lankan government from India, more specifically from anywhere in Tamil Nadu.

What appeared to be a promising start of the peace process, notwithstanding the absence of any move towards discussions on political issues, the surprising proposal by the LTTE wanting to have the talks in India and for its former detester to play a greater role in the peace process has given rise to some circumspection. The reason for this can be discerned from the disruptive moves in the past endeavours which aimed at a political solution for ending the conflict. These resulted in preventing the peace process reaching the critical stage where substantive matters could be discussed and settled peacefully.

In the first peace talks held in Thimphu, Bhuttan in July and August 1985 LTTE participated along with EPRLF, TELO and EROS as a coalition partner in the Eelam National Liberation Front. Although the PLOTE and the TULF were not in the front, all the Tamil groups in the talks realising that the meeting would not lead to a satisfactory political solution, ended the Thimphu talks after two rounds by putting forward four cardinal principles and urging the Sri Lankan government to come up with a political solution based on these (Thimphu) principles.

The second attempt to find a political solution was different as the Indo-Lanka Accord of July 1987 reached by both governments in New Delhi was foisted on the Tamil militant groups. The preceding talks were between the two governments and not even the TULF that had been recognised by India as a moderate Tamil political party was invited to participate in the talks. While the TULF and other militant groups accepted the terms of the Accord, the LTTE after some rethinking rejected the Accord. Since the way the 1987 Accord became a fait accompli without a lengthy negotiation process, there was no opportunity for reassessing the situation.

The peace talks that took place during President Premadasa's time (May 1989 - June 1990) was the longest but yet no political solution emerged. During the 14 months of negotiations, there were no serious political talks. It ended when both sides had achieved their immediate objectives. Both wanted to oust the Indian Peace Keeping Force from Sri Lanka for different reasons and their collaboration succeeded. After the departure of IPKF, Sri Lanka's security forces became the enemy again and the Eelam war resumed and continued ruthlessly for another four years.

The third attempt was during the relatively short period from November 1994 to April 1995 when peace talks started with high hopes and great expectations, especially with President Chandrika Kumaratunga's strong commitment to find a political solution that would grant greater autonomy to the regions than given under the 13th Amendment. She was seeking it through constitutional reforms and this was not the approach the LTTE had in mind. The latter was more keen on the lifting of the embargo on goods and the restrictions on fishing along the North-East coastal waters and the withdrawal of the military from occupied areas than finding a political solution. The LTTE wanted the government to consider political negotiations at a later stage after dealing with the basic problems in the North-East caused by the war. After the Third Eelam war started in April 1995, not only the intense military operations in the North-East but also President Chandrika Kumaratunga's efforts to seek a political solution through changes to the present constitution nearly cost her life.

Although in 2000 Norway was actively involved in helping to arrange peace talks between the PA government and the LTTE, the two sides remained far apart suspicious of each other. LTTE's unilateral ceasefire observed during the 4 months beginning December 24, 2000 did not help either. The intensity of the war was, however, low during the period. It erupted again on a major scale on April 24, 2001 with heavy losses to the State.

Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe's approach now emphasises the peace process rather than a political solution, which clearly is what the LTTE also wants. Both sides have the same objective of changing the existing conditions from war to 'no-war' by at least ceasing hostilities. LTTE is desperate to change the "terrorist" label given by major countries in recent times and is anxious to project itself as a peace-loving freedom movement fighting for self-rule in the North-East. The tragic events of September 11 in the U.S.A which led to the war on terrorism launched jointly by the US and her allies and the various moves in the UN and in major countries to punish terrorists and their financiers and supporters have also compelled the LTTE to remain engaged in a peace process.

The twin planks in the UNF election pledge were the restoration of peace and the strengthening of the economy through economic reforms, better financial management and implementation of development programmes in priority areas neglected in the recent past by resource constraints. People expect positive developments on both these areas as their quality of life depends crucially on them. From the ways public funds were misused in the re-

cent past, it should not surprise anyone that the state coffers cannot provide all the money needed to put the frail economy on a steady growth track.

Annual defence spending has climbed to nearly one billion US Dollars and this by any reckoning is far too much for the 16 billion dollars economy. Last year's budget deficit is expected to be 10 percent of the GDP primarily due to the high military expenditure (Rs.75 billion). Presently, the country's foreign reserves is said to be sufficient to finance imports for just one and a half months. The foreign donors would also be reluctant to extend credit when the government continues to allocate annually increasing amounts of funds to finance the unending war.

Although the approach taken by Ranil ickremesinghe has been welcomed by the LTTE leadership, the speed with which he is proceeding unilaterally in restoring peaceful conditions and introducing confidence-building measures would appear to be too fast for the LTTE giving it cause for concern from the standpoint of maintaining its standing as the guardian of the Tamils in the North-East.

The irony here is that it is the LTTE that wanted as a pre-condition for talks the very steps that the government has taken promptly and would do more if the Jaffna-Kandy highway (A-9 road) could be reopened for both freight and passenger transport. The steps taken so far seem to have pleased the people in the North-East who have suffered for far too long due to various restrictions. However, as noted earlier LTTE's immediate concern appears to be to bring about a change in its present unfavourable international profile, and if somehow the ban is lifted in Sri Lanka and India this would help immensely in convincing the world that it is not a terrorist organisation.

The crucial question is how long the Government and the LTTE remain engaged in the peace process without resuming the war while trying to achieve their respective aims? The war-weary people will prefer to live in a peaceful environment even if a political solution is not imminent, and a state of non-war at least maintained with priority being accorded to rehabilitation work and to the clearing of landmines in order to lead normal lives. ●

The World After September 11

Rajan Philips

The 21st century world history has been given a brutal and big bang beginning, thanks to the elusive Osama bin Laden and his death-craving al-Qaeda followers. Their senseless and horrific attacks in New York and Washington have fundamentally changed the dynamic of world politics in the early years of the new century. President Bush put it well: "All of this was brought upon us in a single day. And night fell on a different world".

The worldwide responses and reactions to the September 11 attacks have come at different levels and in ways that are both coalescing and conflicting. For governments everywhere, the 9/11 attacks have given a new justification for their being, and much needed relief - albeit for all the wrong reasons - from decades of libertarian harassment. The new rationale for 'government' and increased public expenditure is ensuring internal and international security and waging a global war on terrorism. "Either you are with us, or you are with the terrorists" was the American ultimatum to fellow world governments, and one by one everyone of them, including past champions of anti-imperialism and non-alignment, fell in line behind the American-dominated coalition against the al-Qaeda network. Even the countries on America's list of 'usual suspects' supporting terrorism, did not fail to condemn al-Qaeda's 9/11 attacks. But the motivation behind supporting the coalition is more self-serving than global altruism.

Turning Point

Osama bin Laden's trans-border terrorism in New York and Washington gave America the license to unilaterally take the battle to al-Qaeda and its Siamese twin, the notorious Taliban regime, in far away Afghanistan. The Americans preferred and chose the device of a coalition, rather than an alliance or taking a genuinely multilateral approach through the UN, to ensure a free hand in prosecuting its military operations. Internally, these attacks were a turning point for the Bush administration just as the 1995 Oklahoma bombing helped President Clinton to turn around what was then a faltering presidency. President Bush has now found a new purpose for his presidency and a single issue to focus on and rally the nation around rather than being challenged to demonstrate multi-foci leadership on routine matters of state.

After criticising Clinton for his engagement in peace and nation building initiatives abroad, the Bush administration found itself jolted by the 9/11 events to forsake Republican isolationism and get involved in rebuilding Afghanistan, vigorously mediating between Israel and Palestine, and even between India and Pakistan. But in other areas of international commitment, viz. the ABM Treaty and the Kyoto Protocol, the new administration is determined to make America retract from its earlier positions and turn it into the world's most powerful lone ranger, self-sufficient in energy and self-protected by a missile dome.

As well, after early signs of stepping away from its divisive domestic agenda in the wake of the 9/11 tragedy, and despite the disappearance of budget surpluses, the Bush administration is using the prevailing patriotic fervour to push through the old Republican schemes of regressive tax cuts, Arctic drilling (for oil), and faith-based legislation. More worrisome is the evidence of creeping authoritarianism in the name of national security, including the unprecedented Presidential decree to establish 'extra-constitutional' military tribunals to put on secret trial, for acts of terrorism, any individual from anywhere in the world who is not a United States citizen, and subject that

person to imprisonment or death penalty. This is a dangerous trend that is already having relatively milder copycat effects in other western democracies including Canada. America's allies in the NATO are supporting the war on terrorism with varying degrees of enthusiasm, with Britain far and away from the rest led by a gung-ho Tony Blair.

A Convenient Precedent

The responses of other governments are a mixed bag. Given their own experiences with Islamic fundamentalism, notably in Cechnya, Xianjiang, and Kashmir respectively, Russia, China and India, America's old coldwar antagonists, are as implacable in their opposition to al-Qaeda and its long distance operations as are America and its western allies. They see in the American operation in Afghanistan, a convenient precedent for acting unilaterally and without external oversight against terrorism within their territories.

The circumstances of governments in Muslim countries are not so clear cut. Of the three countries, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates, who had been the staunchest benefactors of the Taliban regime, Pakistan has gone full circle. Pakistan's former military ruler Zia ul Haq, who was ostracized as an international *parriah* for hanging his civilian predecessor Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, used Islamic fundamentalism and its fight against Soviet occupation of Afghanistan for his own rehabilitation in the Muslim and Western worlds. Its current military ruler, Pervez Musharraf, who provoked Western censure for overthrowing the corrupt but civilian government of Nawaz Sharif, has shrewdly reversed this tradition and severed Pakistan's ties to the Taliban and al-Qaeda organizations in return for rapprochement with and financial aid from the West and, more importantly, to minimize the geopolitical benefits that India was poised to reap after the 11 September attacks.

In the Middle East, Saudi Arabia has been pushed into the awkward task of choosing between running with the hare or hunting with the hound, rather than doing both as it has done in the past. Saudi Arabia is the principal source of the Wahabi Islamic sect that provides ideological immunity for the Saudi monarchy against republican infection from abroad, first from Nasser's Egypt and, later, from Khomeiny's and post-Khomeiny Iran. The Saudis use their oil wealth, most of which comes from supplying one quarter of America's oil needs, to bandy Wahabism from the Islamic Holy Land to far flung Muslim countries. They also used the continual war in Afghanistan, first against Soviet occupation and later between the Taliban and the mujahideens, to rid Saudi Arabia of restive young men, urging them to go to Afghanistan and Pakistan and fight for Islam against its enemies that eventually included the United States. Until September 11, the US, perhaps on account of its dependence on Saudi oil, turned a blind eye to the Saudi duplicity of playing America's most reliable ally in the Middle East, on the one hand, and bankrolling the cross-border forces of Islamic fundamentalism for whom the US is Islam's worst infidel, on the other. Given that America's closeness to corrupt Islamic regimes is one of the popular Islamic grievances against America, it remains to be seen whether there will be shifts in America's relationship with the Saudi rulers in the future.

An unexpected change in America's Middle East policy may well be in regard to its relationship with Iran. The containment of Iran has been a consistent feature in American policy in the region after the fall of the notorious American puppet, the Shah of Iran. Ever since, Friday sermons by hardline Iranian clerics have usually been ending with the call of "Death to America". However, there has been no love lost between the Iranian authorities and bin Laden's faithfuls and the events of September 11 have been turning Iran and America into strange, but limited and tentative, bedfellows.

Elsewhere, governments buffeted by internal political violence unleashed by groups who are considered to be either terrorists or freedom fighters depending on who is defining the terms, are trying to take political and military mileage in the shadow of America's war against global terrorism. Ariel Sharon provided a brazen example of this approach when he tried to equate Palestinian uprisings to al-Qaeda's attacks on America and use the American example in Afghanistan to crush Palestinian organizations in Israel. America has had to rein in, although with limited success, both the Israeli government and the Palestinian Liberation Organization to prevent a fragile situation from breaking out of control. America seems to be more disposed to allow the government of Philippines to crack down on Abu Sayyaf, a small Muslim separatist group in the archipelago. The governments of Malaysia and Singapore have apprehended several young men belonging to an al-Qaeda -affiliated group called Jemma Islamigu whose fanciful aim is to establish an Islamic state (Daulah Islamiah) comprising Malaysia, Indonesia and the southern Philippines.

The Powerful Message

The events of September 11 have also driven home a powerful message to the ubiquitous merchants of political violence, be they terrorists or freedom fighters, or alternate between the twain, that there are new global constraints to their territorial wars, that war is not an interminable continuation of politics and that at some point war must again give way to politics. The Irish Republican Army's(IRA) decision to decommission its arms was certainly triggered by the events September 11, although the conditions for decommissioning had been evolving over the last few years through agreements involving the British and Irish governments, the Unionists and Sinn Fein. In Sri Lanka, circumstances conducive to peace have not evolved to the same stage as in Northern Ireland, but September 11 has produced a catalytic effect on the new Sri Lankan government and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE). They have both requested the government of Norway to facilitate a new round of talks between them.

The suicide attack on the Indian Parliament in New Delhi, on 13 December, by Islamic groups with bases in Pakistan, led to an upsurge in tension and even the likelihood of yet another war between India and Pakistan, the old neighbourly foes now capable of launching nuclear missiles at each other. For the United States, an Indo-Pakistan war so close to Afghanistan would have been a far worse detraction than the perennial Israeli-Palestinian skirmish.

Fortunately, the US was able to prevail on Pakistan to freeze the assets and apprehend the leaders of Laskar-e-Taiba and Jaish-e-Mohammad, the two groups suspected of organizing the Delhi attack, and on India to exercise caution in light of the significant steps that President Musharraf has been taking to reverse Pakistan's recent tradition of supporting cross-border Islamic incursions. The Indo-Pakistan flashpoint and Israel's anti-Palestinian exuberance were both instances where individual countries felt encouraged to act unilaterally following the American example in Afghanistan. In the absence of an international, multilateral mechanism to deal with global terrorism and its causes, the United States has to be the world's default policeman, putting out regional fires if only to maintain the priority of its own agenda.

Recycling old coldwar rhetoric

The American proclivity for isolationism and unilateralism is matched by the suspicion of and hostility to America in much of the non-western world. Each solitude labours under ugly and abstract misconceptions of the other with little understanding of the realities of the two camps. The post September 11 rhetoric that emanated in both camps betray this misconception and lack of understanding. President Bush and Prime Minister Blair spoke of good and evil, and of democracy, liberal values and tolerance, on the one hand, and their polar opposites on the other. They tried to be politically correct by differentiating between al-Qaeda terrorists and the majority of Muslims, but the nuance was lost not only in the translation across the world but also on the pop-commentators on both sides of the Atlantic.

In the latter's simplistic and shallow thinking, al-Qaeda terrorism is the inevitable by-product of inferior non-western culture. For authority, they turn to a scholarly work, Samuel Huntington's *The Clash of Civilizations*, which itself is not immune from shallow thinking for, as Benjamin Barber (in *Jihad vs. McWorld*) has cogently argued, global terrorism is not the symptom of any clash between civilizations but "a dialectical expression of tensions built into a single global civilization". The meaning of the new global dialectic was also lost on some of the left-wing critics of the United States, who recycled much of the old coldwar rhetoric not only to criticise American retaliation in Afghanistan but also to suggest the 'context' for the destruction of the New York towers and Washington's Pentagon.

The missing dimensions

The collapse of the socialist second world, sweeping but uneven economic globalization, the attenuation of the nation state, the diminishing of the United Nations, and the undemocratic functioning of the World Bank, the IMF and the WTO, have all created a dangerous chasm between the centres of economic and political power and the marginalized and disenfranchised majority of the world's population. The Durban conference on 'racism' was a manifestation of this chasm but, unfortunately, it did not come close to even a proper formulation of this central question. Mediating this chasm is not the agenda of the al-Qaeda terrorists; instead, they have cleverly exploited the trans-border appeal of Islam and their oil-based resources to mobilize the marginalized against America and the west. The American response to the September 11 attacks has been three pronged: military retaliation against the perpetrators of the crime, financial retaliation to freeze the sources and movement of terrorist funds, and security measures to prevent terrorist infiltration into the country. Even if they are all necessary components in the fight against terrorism, they are not sufficient by themselves.

Two missing dimensions are a multilateral framework that is more broadbased than the NATO, and a political approach to address the social, political and economic frustrations in the non-western world that breed hostility to the West in general and manifestations of terrorism in the extreme.

The coldwar period provided a bipolar restraint against unilateralism by either of the two superpower camps. Since the end of the coldwar, however, the United States has done nothing to enhance the authority of the United Nations, and has either opposed or been indifferent to multilateral initiatives in regard to environmental protection, landmine and biological weapons regulations, or establishing an international criminal court. The rest of the world can do little in these matters without US leadership or, at least, its active participation. It would be a grave mistake to interpret the Taliban's rapid and seemingly unmourned collapse in Afghanistan as a vindication of American unilateralism and isolationism and, worse, extend this approach to Iraq or elsewhere.

(First published in the Toronto Peace Magazine)

Jayalalithaa Gets Ready to Return as Chief Minister

G. Sambedkar

It would not be too much of an exaggeration to describe AIADMK supremo Jayalalithaa Jayaram as the 21st century phoenix. She is never crushed completely. She keeps bouncing back, to the dismay of her enemies and the disappointment of her critics.

She now stands exonerated in all the four cases in which she had been convicted. Trial is nearing completion in yet another corruption case, but few expect any adverse turn for her, till at least the next Assembly elections. Everything has been going her way for some time now.

Not one to waste any time, she has arranged to have a constituency vacated from where she will be contesting in February next, at Andipatti in Madurai district. The MLA of that place resigned much before the verdicts were delivered.

Despite the façade of sobriety she might like to wear these days, trying to make others believe that she has learnt at least a few lessons after the 1996 electoral debacle, she does remain her old arrogant, vengeful and corrupt self. One can only sigh at the prospect of her reign for over four years.

Such considerations did not weigh in the minds of their Lordships who delivered their 'not guilty' verdicts in December.

Easily the most awaited and most decisive judgement was in the two TANSI-related cases. It was the conviction in the two TANSI-related cases that had prevented Jayalalithaa from contesting the last Assembly elections. Land measuring over three acres in the heart of the city and belonging to the state-owned TANSI was sold to the Jaya-Publications and the Sasi Enterprises in May 1992.

The charge was that she had misused her position as Chief Minister to buy up the land at much below market rates, thus causing the government a huge financial loss, of over Rs.4 crore including stamp duty. A special court had convicted Jayalalithaa last year to three years of rigorous imprisonment in the JayaPublications case and to two years in the other.

"The entirety of the evidence let in by the prosecution does not establish even a single link to show that the conspirators agreed to have the property sold or purchased at lesser price so as to cause wrongful loss or wrongful gain," ruled Justice N.Dinakar of the Madras High Court. "The special court had erred in taking the guideline value and market value are two different concepts and that the term 'market value' is vague, uncertain and a matter of guess work," he observed.

Anyway when an adjoining piece of property of the TANSI had been sold to a government body at a comparable price, "no sinister motive could be seen in the transactions, especially when the sale was by open tender," the judge reasoned.

Besides the TANSI was not an extended arm of the government. The sale deed was executed by the Chairman and Managing Director of the TANSI on behalf of the TANSI and stated TANSI was the absolute owner of the property.

While several cases were registered against Jayalalithaa and her associates, the DMK government seemed to place a lot of hope in the TANSI cases alone as they hinged essentially on documentary evidence.

"It is a cast-iron case. We've plugged all the loopholes. Her conviction is certain, you'd see...," investigating officials used to boast. And they seemed to be vindicated when the special court convicted her in October 2000.

But now the High Court has overturned the decision, brushing aside each and every point made by the prosecution.

To say that because the transaction was effected through tender there could not have been any foul play or a full time Chairman makes the TANSI a completely independent entity, autonomous of the government, or market value is almost a figment of imagination reveals not so much a considered judgement as the orientation of the judge.

Dinakar is presumably noted for his integrity and knowledge of law and he generally stretches lawyers arguing before him on the rack, with incisive questions. In fact when his appointment was announced, replacing another judge, following an application to the Supreme court, many thought Jayalalithaa's fate was sealed. But even during the hearing he wrung the prosecution counsel dry, a clear indication that he was not

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convinced of the guilt of the accused. At one time the Special Public Prosecutor burst out in open court, challenging the merciless grilling by Dinakar.

The same judge exonerated Jayalalithaa and other accused in the Kodaikanal Pleasant Stay Hotels case too. The case related to the granting of permission for the construction of a multi-storeyed hotel in the hill station of Kodaikanal in violation of the rules governing construction in hill areas. It was when the Special Court convicted her in this case to a one year term, the AIADMK cadres went berserk and burnt a bus carrying college students. Three girls were charred to death in that ghastly incident.

On earlier occasions, the High Court had passed strictures on the previous Jayalalithaa government on the issue.

But Dhinakar was taking a charitable view. "...men are fallible," he remarked, "and therefore if an order is contrary to the rules, and hence incorrect, no prosecution can be launched."

Twenty three days later Jayalalithaa and her cohorts were acquitted by the Special Court itself in the coal scam. Not many had expected her to be convicted in it. The case against her was considered weak.

The trial is on in the disproportionate wealth case which is nearing completion in the special court. Though there too the prosecution case is considered strong, nothing much is expected to come out of it now. The only hope for those concerned with probity in public life is the Supreme Court where an appeal has been filed in the TANSI case by a DMK functionary.

Chief Justice Barucha is seen as a strong no-nonsense man, and hence the hope. But then even Dhinakar was described one such before the hearing in the High Court commenced.

Jayalalithaa herself does not seem to be unduly bothered about Barucha's inclinations. She is preparing to resume the reins. She has already declared that she would contest from Andipatti. And that constituency being a Thevar stronghold, she is expected to have a smooth sailing. And such is her new-found confidence that she has quietly jettisoned one ally after another. The PMK stormed out when she refused to support the candidature of Dr.Ramadoss's son Anbumani. The Congress and the CPM had already gone it alone in the local body polls. The CPI is also getting increasingly disenchanted.

The TMC seemed to be the only remaining ally of the AIADMK. But she has chosen to nominate a former BJP functionary, Dr.V.Maitreyan, for the Rajya Sabha election to be held for the seat rendered vacant following the death of TMC leader G.K.Moopanar, thus slamming the doors on the TMC too. Moopanar's son G.K.Vasan was eyeing the seat and had been making conciliatory noises for some time now. But Amma could not care less. With the death of Moopanar, whatever relevance the TMC had, that too seemed to have vanished. Hence her contemptuous indifference to it.

That apart she is said to have renewed her efforts to move closer to the BJP. Her unsolicited support to the Prevention of Terrorism Ordinance (POTO) when the DMK was humming and hawing on the issue would surely have warmed the cockles of some BJP leaders. Though at the moment the BJP high command is protesting strongly that it has no intention of ditching the DMK, not many believe it. After all it would but make sense for the party to join hands with the AIADMK at the time of next Lok Sabha elections due in 2004, if not earlier.

The planetary conjunction is all supposed to be in her favour. The sudden removal of the Kannagi statue on the marina has triggered a great interest in astrology right across the state.

First the police claimed that in a minor accident in the small hours a lorry had ran into the railings surrounding the statue, partially damaging the fence. But subsequently it was put out the pedestal had been damaged and there was a danger that the statue would topple over. And then the statue itself vanished complete with the pedestal and road in that area was relaid at an incredible speed. For sometime nobody even seemed to know the whereabouts of the statue. Then it was revealed that the statue had been removed by the government, on astrological advice.

An astrologer close to the Poes Garden told mediapersons later that location of the statue was casting an evil eye on the rulers who were traversing the road beneath it. After all she had fought and vanquished the rulers of her time. Besides the statue of an angry woman baying for the blood of the king did not bode well for the government.

Furious protests have sprung from various Tamil nationalist quarters. A rattled government now says it is willing to reinstall the statue on the marina, but evasive on where exactly it would be put up.

The gods have kindly responded to her overtures, and hence she is in no mood to antogonise them by inauspicious gestures. Rational human beings or passionate Tamil nationalists could stew in their own juice. ●

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MATRIMONIAL

Jaffna Tamil sister *seeks bride for brother, 40, UK permanent resident. Please send details. M 1267 C/O Tamil Times.*

Jaffna Hindu parents *seek professional groom for solicitor daughter working for leading UK firm, 26, British-born. Please send horoscope, details. M 1270 c/o Tamil Times.*

Doctor parent *seeks sober, non-smoking, Tamil, Catholic professional partner, 26-32 years, for their pretty graduate daughter, 25, British citizen, Research Chemist. Reply with details. M 1276 do Tamil Times.*

Jaffna Christian brother *seeks professionally qualified groom for sister, 28, 5'2", British citizen, Biomedical scientist in good employment. Please send details. M 1277 c/o Tamil Times.*

Jaffna Hindu parents *seek professional qualified, fair, attractive bride for their son, 25, British qualified medical doctor. Please send, horoscope, photo. M 1278 c/o Tamil Times.*

Jaffna Hindu parents *seek professional bride for son, 28, M.Sc. (Computer Engineering), working in leading firm. Please send horoscope details. M 1279 c/o Tamil Times.*

Jaffna Hindu parents *seek educated groom in good employment for their Dental Surgeon daughter, 29. Please send details. M 1280 c/o Tamil Times.*

WEDDING BELLS

Rasiah and Mrs Indranee Rasiah of 5 New Way Road, Colindale, London NW9 6HR on 2 November 2001 at Sri Kanaga Thurrgai Amman Temple, Chapel Road, Ealing, London W13 4AE.

Subo, *daughter of Mr. Candiah Kathiresan and Mrs Pathmadevi Kathiresan of 299 Torbay Road, Harrow, Middx HA2 9QD and* **Prajeev**, *son of Lieut. Commander Rajan*

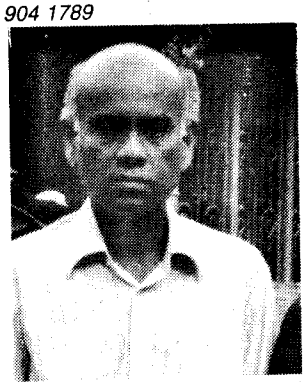
Rajamohan, *son of Mr. & Mrs Anandeswaran of 33, Sagara Road, Bambalapitiya, Colombo 4 and* **Thuvaraha**, *daughter of Mr. & Mrs. Krishnamoorthy, 3 2/2 39th Lane, Off Vihara Lane, Wellawatte, Colombo 6 on 19th January 2002 at Hotel Concord Conimara Wedding Hall, 139-141 Galle Road, Dehiwela,*

OBITUARIES

Mr. Appappilai Navaratnam, *retired General Manager, National Savings Bank; former Deputy General Manager, Bank of Ceylon and UN Consultant; son of late Mr. & Mrs Appappilai of Kokuvil; beloved husband of Meenambikai; precious and loving father of Bhavani and Vathani; much loved father-in-law of Dr. T. Maheswaran and Kamalanathan, darling grandfather of Dhanusha, Vidya and Brahen (all of UK); brother of late Sivagurunathan (Advo-cate), late Sithamparanathan, late Ratnam and Maheswary; son-in-law of late Mr. & Mrs M. Ganapathipillai of Manipay and brother-in-law of Mahes-waran (all of Sri Lanka) passed away in Colombo, Sri Lanka on 02 October 2001. The funeral rites were performed at his residence in Colombo (6a, Sulaiman Terrace, Colombo 5) on 04th October 2001 in the presence of a large gathering of relations and friends. Cremation took place at Kanatte, Colombo at 4p.m.*

The wife, children and other family members sincerely thank all relatives, friends, past and present members of the staffs of National Savings Bank, Bank of Ceylon and Central Bank who attended the funeral, sent floral tributes and messages of condolence and who had helped in numerous ways at the time of their bereavement.

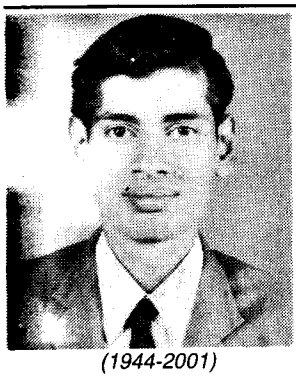
They regret their inability to thank them individually. - Mrs Navaratnam & Vathani Kamalanathan, 37 Kingsfield Avenue, North Harrow, Middx HA2 6AQ, UK Tel: 0208 933 1950/ Bhavani Maheswaran, 78 Sudbury Court Drive, Harrow, Middx, UK. Tel: 0208 904 1789



Mr. C. Akileswaran, *Retired Vice-Principal, Skanda Varodaya College, Chunnakam,Sri Lanka; only son of the late Chinniah and Amirthavalli; son-in-law of the late Kathiravelu and Paripooranam; beloved husband of Selvaranee; loving father of Bakirathy (UK) and Sivarupan (Rupan); grandfather of Kobicka; father-in-law of Hariram (UK); brother of Mrs Sushiladevi Sivayoganathan, Mrs Kamaladevi Sivasubramaniam, Mrs Sarojadevi Arasaratnam and Mrs Sarathadevi Sivagnanasund-eram (both of UK); passed away on 29 November 2001 and was cremated at Galkissa Crematorium, Sri Lanka on 2 December.*

The members of the family wish to thank all friends, relatives and members of associations who attended the funeral, sent floral tributes and messages of sympathy and assisted them in several ways during the period of bereavement.- Mrs S. Sivagnanasund-aram, 105 Essex Road, Leyton, London Bl0 6EG. Tel: 020 8925 8463

Mrs Pavalam Ramasamy; *beloved wife of late Vaithilingam Ramasamy; loving mother of Eng. Vijayaratnam (Head, Dept. of Agricultural Engineering, Faculty of Agriculture, University of Jaffna), Vijayakumar (Jaffna), Vijayadevi, Vijayarani and Jegasothy (London); mother-in-law of Mrs Vijayaratnam (Research Officer in charge of Agricultural Research Station, Thirunelvely, Jaffna), Nathan, Sundaralingam, Thillainathan (London), Naguleswary (Jaffna); grandmother of Puroshowththaman, Toothiransali, Menaka, Luxana, Anand, Luxagini and Vasantha passed away in London on November 29, 2001. The cremation took place on December 10, 2001 in Hounslow, Middx – 11 Bulstrode Avenue, Hounslow, Middx. TW3 3AA. Tel: 0208 577 6377.*



(1944-2001)

Sangarapillai Nadarajah *of Point Pedro, Sri Lanka; son of late Mr. Sangarapillai, Advocate, Point Pedro & late Mrs Pakium Sangarapillai; brother of late Dr. S. Krishnaswamy of Singapore, late Mrs Leela Rajakulasingam of Chicago, Mrs Valli Suryakumaran of Colombo Tel: 574912, Mr. S. Ganeson of Northolt,UK : 020 8845 7900, Mrs Pathmanathan (Mathura) of Toronto : 416 439 5995, Mr. Sriskanthan of Kandy: 226991, Mrs Kamala Kanapathipillai of Canvey Island, UK: 01268 514624 and Mr. S. Gunanayagam (Thasan) of San Jose, California: 408 578 6645. The funeral took place on Saturday, 15th December morning in Puloly West, Point Pedro.*

The members of the family would like to express their gratitude to all those who attended the funeral, sent messages of sympathy and telephoned them during the period of bereavement. The late Nadarajah will be remembered as a very religious and kind-hearted individual who will be missed by all his family members, relatives and friends not only in Sri Lanka but also across the seas.

May his soul rest in peace.

IN MEMORIAM

In loving Memory of

In loving memory of **Mrs Ganeswary Tharmalingam** *of Kondavil East, Jaffna on the ninth anniversary of her passing away on 21st January 1993.*

Sadly missed and fondly remembered by her loving husband Tharmalingam; children Brabalini, Bremjit and Ranjit; son-in-law Dr. W. N. Lingan-andhan; daughters-in-law Dr. Vani Bremjit and Shamini Ranjit; grandchildren Abhirami, Sathya, Praneela, Praseetha, Prashoban, Praveen and Anjana. - 5, Beaulieu Boule-vard, Beaulieu Park, Chelms-ford, Essex CM1 6EA. Tel: 01245 466363.

In loving memory of **Vimal Raj Linganayagam** *on the first anniversary of his passing away on 5th January 2001.*

Deeply missed and affectionately remembered by his wife Bianca; Mum & Dad (Mr. & Mrs V. T. Linganay-agam); Appa and Amma (Mr. & Mrs L. Fernando) and all whose hearts were touched by his presence.

Address V. T. Linganayagam, 90, Orchard Street, Kempston, Bedford MK42 7JJ.

In loving memory of **Mrs Lalithambal Sandrasekeram** *of Temple Road, Jaffna, Sri Lanka on the 3rd Anniversary of her passing away.*

Born: 5.10.1926.
Called to rest: 28.1.1999.

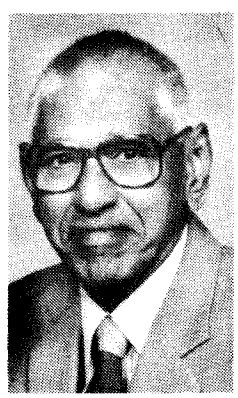
Love and Remembrance
Last for Ever
Affectionately remembered by your loving husband, children, in-laws, grandchildren and brothers. - 37, Grove Road, Ealing, London W5 5DS.

Second Death Anniversary of Mrs Sivapackiam Muthukumarasamy

"Time heals all wounds"
Or so they say.
But some wounds do not heal,
We are left to suffer day-by-day.
As time goes by our pain still stays

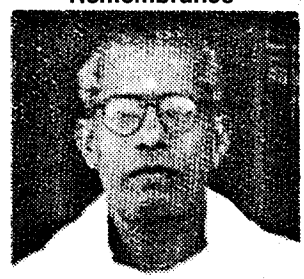
(28.04.1923 -08.01.2000)

A loving wife to her husband Mr. Muthukumarasamy, a caring mother to her children and sons-in-laws and daughters-in-law, a wonderful grandmother to her many grandchildren and a great friend to many, she will always be sadly missed and forever remembered with great fondness.- 2 Raybell Court, Linkfield, Isleworth, Middx TW7 6QT



In ever loving memory of **Gregory Joseph,** *formerly of Cement Corporation (Kankesanthurai and Puttalam) and of Nigeria on the second anniversary of his passing away on January 18, 2000. Sadly missed and fondly remembered by his loving wife Erin; children Dr. Eugene, Enakshi and Hyacinthe; daughter-in-law Dr. Sharmun; son-in-law Paul Wood and daughter-in-law Neoline - 338, Meadowood Lane, Vadnais Heights, Minnesoto 55127, USA. Tel: 651 482 7558.*

25th Anniversary Remembrance



Called to Rest: 14 January 1977
In Loving Memory of the Late Mr. Mylvaganam Vanniasingam Selvanayagam of Jaffna, Sri Lanka.

Dear Pappa,

In our Mind and Daily Thoughts affectionately remembered on the Twenty Fifth Anniversary of your passing away on Thai-Pongal day by your loving children, in-laws, grandchildren, great grandchildren.- M.P.C., 6 Brook Road, Redhill, Surrey, UK.

FORTHCOMING EVENTS

Feb 1 *Sandesurar Guru Poojah*
Feb 2 *South London Tamil Welfare Group (SLTWG) Drop In, Talk on Benefits. Tel: 020 8540 3285; Feast of the Presentation of the Lord, Jesus Christ.*
Feb 5 *Thiruneelakandar Guru Poojah; Feast of St. Agatha*
Feb 7 *Krishna Eekathasi*
Feb 9 *Sani Pirathosam*
Feb 10 *Feast of St. Scholastica*
Feb 11 *Amavasai; Feast of Our Lady of Lourdes*
Feb 14 *St. Valentine's Day*
Feb 16 *Sathurthi; SLTWG Drop In Tel: 020 8540 3285*
Feb 18 *Shashti*
Feb 19 *Karthigai*
Feb 23 *Sukkla Eckathasi*
Feb 25 *Pirathosam*
Feb 26 *Full Moon; Masi Maham*
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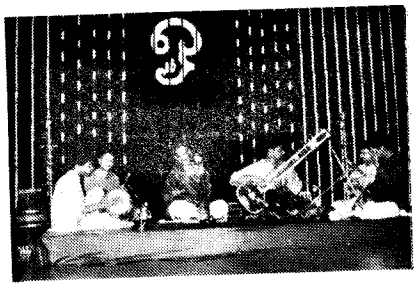
Kavithan's Miruthanga Arangetram



The Miruthanga Arangetram of Kavithan, Disciple of Guru Sri K.S. Bhavani Shankar and son of Sri & Srimathi Pathmam-ohan of Mitchley Avenue, Purley took place at Ashcroft Theatre, Croydon on 4th November 2001 before a large gathering of music lovers. I was delighted to be invited but was a little nervous that the Miruthangam that this twelve year child would be hugging would be some what heavy for him. After listening to his performance and watching the dexterity, he was flashing out from his face, I felt that Kavithan would be a Vidwan one day, God willing.

The repertoire was balanced and the performance above all started on time, probably because of the keen sense of punctuality of the mathematician father of the artiste. Kavithan's rendering of the rhythm cycles, pleasurable and never laboured, did credit to him as well as his teacher and proved that the quality of carnatic classical music in Britain can be kept to a high standard provided that there is dedication, devotion and discipline. Indeed it is these "3Ds" that constitute the message of Sri Bhavani Shankar to all his students. Refreshingly, the packed hall was regaled with a veritable feast of music in which many ragas were featured. Among these were the much loved Kalyani, Hamsadwani, Hindolam, Kambhoji, and Revati. The main talas were Adi and Rupaka Chapu. Kavithan was not overawed while accompanying first class musicians on the stage. They on their part, assisted him most generously. It was after all his great day.

It was Guru Sri Bhavani Shanker's innovative idea to use the Sitar for this programme. The north Indian Hindustani instrument was played with authority by Sri Sarangan Sriranganathan, while the vocalist was the melodious Sri Kuttalam Nagarajan. The other accompanists Sri Thiruvarur Kothandapani - Violin, Sri Bangalore R. N. Prakash - Ghatam and Sri Kandiah Sithamparanathan Morsing were excellent. The whole programme was very competently compered in both Tamil and English by Kumari Bawani Sivagurunathan and Sri Muhilan Pathinamohan.

The Chief Guest was the author Sri Reginald Massey, who in his speech congratulated the young Kavithan and wished him well for the future. He praised the Guru, the musicians and Kavithan's parents and said that the Arangetram was an outstanding success.

Rasikai G. S.

Tamil Doctor Honoured

On 14th December 2001 at the Basildon Mental Health Unit in the presence of many colleagues, co-workers and members and officers of the South Essex Mental Health Trust including Mrs. Jai Tout (Chair of the Trust Board) and Patrick Geoghegan (Chief Executive), the recently furbished Centre was formally opened by Dr. R. Thaya-Paran, FRCPsych, FFARCS, DPM.

In appreciation of the dedicated work done by **Dr. Paran** from the time the Mental Health Unit opened in January 1977 till his retirement in 1997, as the Consultant in charge of ECT in addition to his other catchment-area responsibilities, the NHS Trust Board decided to name the Centre 'Paran Suite'

Michael Lowe the Medical Director said that Dr. Paran, with postgraduate qualifications in both Anaesthesia and Psychiatry, was the most appropriate person to lead the treatment centre. He added that achievement of perfection was the motive that drove Dr. Paran and it was his constant demands for improvement that led to the treatment procedures at this Centre reaching the highest professional standards and to structural modifications to the suite over time, leading to the current configuration which now meets all the requirements of the Royal College of Psychiatrists.

In response to the compliments spoken, Dr. Thaya-Paran said that Paran Suite was a fitting name for that centre not because it contained part of his name but because the word **Paran** is one of the descriptive names by which God is referred to in Tamil. As such Paran Suite would translate to **"The abode of God"** - a name to reassure the anxious and agitated patients coming for treatment.

In appreciation of the encouragement and support she has been offering her husband, Sivakumary Thayaparan was presented with a bouquet of flowers by the Trust Board Chair, Mrs Jai Tout.

The Sri Lanka Railway Past Employees Welfare Association -UK

The Christmas celebrations of the above Association was held on Sunday, 16th December at the Air Training Corps Hall amidst a large gathering of members, their families, friends and well wishers commencing at 12 noon. The proceedings started as is customary with the switching on of the Christmas tree, the President Mr. Kannudurai's welcome address and the cutting of the Christmas cake. The Secretary Mr.M. Selvanayagam commenced the game of Tombola and the lucky winner was Mr. K. G. Alwis, who donated half the prize money to the association. In the selection of the best dressed in the gathering, the judges selected Mrs T. Mahadevan - Best Dressed Lady and Mr. M. Balasundaram - the Best Dressed Gent and they were awarded valuable prizes by the President.

After a sumptuous briyani lunch, the President speaking to the gathering complimented Mr. A. Manikkam, the patron of the Association for the yeoman services rendered by him and presented a specially designed trophy with a Railway Engine embossed with the necessary engravings. Mrs P. Arulampalam and Mrs T. Mahadevan distributed Christmas presents to the children.

It was a very pleasant occasion when Mr. K. Sivagnanam from Australia and Mr. S. Maha-lingam from Canada (both retired S. M s) and several past employees resident in the UK made it an enjoyable get together which terminated at 3 p .m.

15th Anniversary Celebrations of Senior Tamils' Centre

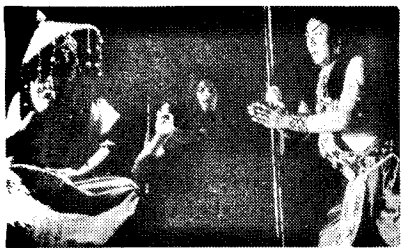
The Senior Tamils' Centre, Ontario, Canada which was formed in 1986 with 20 members with the mission of the total well being, including the adaptation to the Canadian way of life of the aging population among the Tamil Community of Ontario has completed 15 years of service to the community and has now a membership of over 1400. The picture below is of His Worship, the Mayor of Toronto, the Chief Guest at the function making a presentation to Mrs Ratnes Sanmuganathan, President of the Senior Tamils' Centre at the 15th Anniversary Celebrations held on 17th November 2001 at the Oriole Community Centre, Don Mills.

The Guest of Honour was Dr. Sudharshan Devanesan, the first Sri Lankan, who received the 'Order of Canada' in August 2001. Dr. Devanesan is Associate Professor of Community Medicine at the University of Toronto.

The services provided by the centre include advocacy, counselling, the holding of information meetings and seminars. Celebration of Age, Canada Day, Deepavali and Christmas etc have been a regular feature. The organisation of tours - 66 tours involving over 5600

participants - has been an important activity.. Holiday camps are conducted in conjunction with the Family Services Association of Toronto. The playing of the card game 'Bridge' is the mam mdoor recreational activity and tournaments are held regularly. Drop in centres are organised. 'What was started as a 'birthday ' wish program has expanded into telephone comforting for the sick and feeble. The timely publication of a quarterly newsletter is an invaluable help in conducting the centre's activities. The Centre is actively involved in assisting members to obtain social housing.

UTTAR PRIYARDARSHI



Recently, on 28th Sept 2001, I witnessed a brilliant production called 'Uttar Priyardarshi' by the Chorus Repertory Theatre at the Barbican (London)

Uttar Priyardharshi's protagonist is Asoka, the third emperor of the Maura dynasty (324 187 BC), during whose reign the Indian empire reached its height, still not matched by the history of other kingdoms and governments of India. His predecessors, his grand father Chandra Gupta Mauraya (324 - 300 BC) and his father Bindisera gained wide reputation as ruthless military rulers whose campaigns succeeded in the conquest of much of North India. But it was under Asoka that the empire reached its highest, for it was a result of his victories in battles that the Mauraya came to rule almost the entire Indian sub-continent while maintaining a significant degree of political unity.

But it is not only military triumphs that make Asoka's life one of compelling interest. Records from some of his edicts which Asoka had inscribed on pillars, rocks and cave walls and which are our major sources of historically reliable information about him - that he had a very dramatic change of heart after defeating the neighbouring people of Kalinga. The edicts indicate that Asoka felt great remorse over his past deeds of violent armed conflicts and embraced the ethic of promoting peace, tolerance and the welfare of all living beings under his sovereignty. Asoka's main concern, as expressed in his edicts, became the propagation of dharma a concept, which has many connotations such as truth. morality and righteousness and familial and social responsibility.

Immediately after Kalinga was conquered, King Priyadharsha became intensely devoted to the study of dharma, the love of dharma and the inculcation of dharma. He is moved to remorse now. For he has felt profound sorrow and regret because the conquest of a people previous~ unconquered involves slaughter, death and destruction. But there is more important reason for the king's remorse. The Brahmin priests and religious strives as well as followers of other religions and house holders who all practised obedience to superiors, parents and teachers and proper courtesy to friends, acquaintances, companions, relatives, servants and places - all suffer with injury, slaughter and desperation of their loved ones.

Thus all people share in the misfortune and this weighs heavily on the King's mind. King Priyardharshi desires security, self-control, impartiality and happiness for all living creatures. He considers dharma to be the most important conquest. King Priyardharshi ultimately attaches value on the consequences of action (karma) in the next birth.

This stage production in seven dramatic scenes was directed by Ratan Thiyam. Imbued with poetry and visual power, rich in imagery and electrifying intensity, 'Uttar Priyardharshi' is a panoramic meditation on war and peace.

Ratan Thiyam is acknowledged as one of the most important and influential theatre maker. International theatre directors, Peter Brook, Tudashi Suzuki and Eugene Barba have acknowledged Thiyam as one of the world's great directors. He is India's Peter Brook (of Mahabharata fame). Thiyam is a pioneer of the theatre with 'Roots Movement' in Manipur. He moved from British influenced drama and turned to the roots in folk and classical performance to create a modern Indian theatre.

Ratan Thiyam's recent productions are about war and the power-hungry politicians who wage it. 'Antigone' and 'Chakra Yurdha' are two of his master pieces. He is a director, designer, writer and choreographer. In Uttar Priyardharshi he achieves an aesthetic, precision production.

According to Thiyam, 'Uttar Priyardharshi' is the tale of a power hungry man, who has gathered many experiences in life, yet like any modern man has difficulty controlling himself. So it is a play about a man's attempt to control his own ego and his own violent urges. It is a play about peace, about non-violence about the growing attitude of waging war and about the effect of war.

The focus is on the relationship between Priyardharshi and Ghor, the wanton destroyer and lord of hell, hired to torture the people. Priyardharshi enters hell and Ghor torments him. He finds a Bikku who is undisturbed by hell's misery and challenges Priyardharshi to look deeply into himself; to recognise and embrace the evil within him as well as good, for only by doing so will he be able to liberate himself and thus accept the gift of enlightenment.

Some of the poignant scenes were, the opening with chanting of a prayer from Jan Samvedas (monks) joined by eight members of the chorus and four narrators bearing symbols of the eight fold path of Lord Buddha setting effectively the mood of the drama, which was to unfold. This was Thiyams own invention of Buddhist rituals based on local tradition. The music very cleverly mixed bells and drums; the triumphant return of Asoka from the battle, seated in a howdah atop a prop-elephant; the dance of death by Ghor; appearances of torture devises from various historical periods we continue to manufacture more and more human torturing machines, human killing machines, more bullets and more AK-47 more missiles. There is no balance, no control.

Priyardharshi was expecting to be welcomed home, but is greeted instead by rivers of blood, represented by strips of red cloth hanging as vertical banners engulfing him, and by wailing war widows shrouded in white. Priyadharshi is swept in a whirlpool of agony which is represented by swirling red fabric that envelopes him from head to toe. Thiyam says his scenes are awash with the colour red. The aural environments created were encompassing mixture of text sung, spoken, chanted and spat out.

The sensitive lighting was designed and executed by Ratan Thiyam himself. So for Thiyam and the company which had adopted this traditional Indian dramatic structure for their work a language from space, gesture, colour, light, sound, melody and rhythm is being built a multidimentional language through which ideas are communicated at many levels and from many different angles. This makes Thiyam's theatre richly communicative across the barriers of spoken language and more accessible to international audience. It is no wonder that the mixed audience stood up and gave vent to the impact on their senses by continuing ovation. A spiritual balance was achieved.

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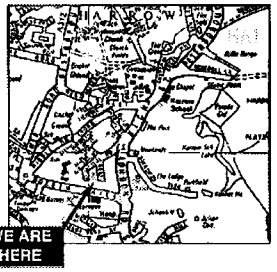

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